

"DO YOU THINK I WOULD ATTEMPT TO BUY A WIFE?"

"WANTED"

BY

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"CHRISTIAN'S ENDEAVOR" • HER ASSOCIATE MEMBER.

"TWENTY MINUTES LOVE" • "THE LITTLE CARD."

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"WANTED."

CHAPTER I.

TORN HEART-STRINGS.

THE room was dreary; very dreary. Outside it was November, and a drizzly rain was falling, which the wind occasionally took hold of and swept in angry gusts straight into people's faces. The streets were dark, for in this portion of the town street-lamps were few and far between. But the street was bright.ess and cheer, and the season springtime, compared with the gloom of that fourth-story back room.

To begin with the carpet—and by the way, it is the carpet with which one has always to begin, of evenings; in the daytime one notices the windows and the possibility of sunshine—the carpet could be described by that one word "stuffy." No, it isn't a nice word; but then it is expressive. The carpet was dark and large-figured, and showed

the mark of every footfall; and much of the dust of years gone by seemed to have settled in its warp and pushed away the filling. Oh! the carpet was ugly; so was the furniture. There was a folding-bed, for the room was so small that had the bed not folded, it would have asserted itself so completely as to leave no space for its occupant. But there are folding-beds and folding-beds. This one was of the sort which made itself into a nondescript thing — a cross between wardrobe and mantelpiece; and looking drearily unlike either. Besides, the curtain which hung limp and discouraged before it was an ugly imitation of tapestry, and was cotton. As for the springs, and mattress, and blankets hiding behind this curtain, perhaps entire silence is the best which can be done for them.

There were toilet appointments which matched the bed. There was a small, neat, cozy-looking sewing-chair, the only pleasant touch in the room, unless one excepts something which was in the room, but not of it; a framed photograph of a sweet face, and tender mother-eyes that looked down upon the occupant of the sewing-chair. Did they have in them a wistful, yearning gaze? Rebecca Meredith often looked up at them and asked herself the question. This stuffy room on the fourth floor of a fourth-rate down-town boarding-house, was Rebecca Meredith's home. "All the home I have," she sometimes told her-

self bitterly, and looked up at the pictured face and felt the sharp contrast between it and the home she used to know.

That was away off in a large town which combined many of the advantages of a city, with most of the comforts of the country. It was a large house, as old-fashioned country houses go, and her room had been a second-story front, with an eastern and southern exposure, and with four large windows. In the summer there was India matting on the floor, and in winter a soft, creamy-brown carpet that caught the sunlight, and had checkerberries sprinkled over it. There were muslin curtains at the windows both winter and summer, for Rebecca "hated stiff things." Ah, the old home! she had not known half how sweet and clean and dear it was until after she spent winter and summer in this fourth-floor room. No, the old house had not burned, or been sold, or mortgaged, or anything of the kind. "Father" still lived there, and went in and out as he had for thirty years or more. And Mrs. Meredith lived there also; but Rebecca Meredith did not, any more. Yes, there is a sense in which it is the old story of which we hear so much—at least in books. A happy home, a bright childhood, then sickness, then death; then desolation; then a new wife, and the children scattered. History, even in fiction, is constantly repeating itself; always harping on the old strings, because those,

somehow, are the heart-strings, and it is hard to break from them.

But Rebecca Meredith's story was not like that of the average weekly newspaper or dime novel. There had been no disgraceful scenes in her old home. Her step-mother had neither starved nor beaten her, nor lashed her with her tongue. She had been always a lady, and had meant to be always kind to Rebecca, as well as just to her.

Then was the fault Rebecca's? Why, I hardly know. Rebecca is my friend; I admire her; in fact I love her. How am I to lay bare her faults before you? Yet, unless I do, how are you to know her? For we of flesh and blood are so largely made up of faults, that unless they are mentioned it is of no use to fancy we are acquainted with one another. Rebecca meant to do right. She had a fixed—I had almost said stern—sense of right, and she intended to live up to it. She began wrong, as most people do who get at odds with life; and she began by calling wrong, right. Perhaps most people at some time in their lives have done that, also. She had a feeling that her experiences were peculiar, which was natural, certainly. We have the word of inspiration for it that the human heart is prone to cry out, "There is no sorrow like unto my sorrow." Perhaps, though, she had been more to her mother than many girls are. The father was a busy physician, who had hardly time to make the acquaintance of

his own family, yet contrived to lavish so many kindnesses on them that they thought they knew him, and loved and honored him. There were two boys, who inherited their father's studious tastes and lived much among books. One was older than Rebecca, and had gone early from home to college, to seminary, and then to India as a missionary physician. One was two years younger, but had kept pace with his brother until they were ready for the seminary, and then had far outstripped him, and gone to Heaven to live. By reason of all these things Rebecca and her mother were much alone together, and grew to know each other with that peculiar knowledge which is given to but few. They read each other's books, and thought each other's thoughts. The busy physician's purse was not a full one. He lived in a factory town, and there were many poor, and there was much sickness among the poor, and Dr. Meredith was a benevolent man, and the boys' educations were expensive. Rebecca quietly gave up the idea of going away from home to complete her education. She was a fair, not a brilliant scholar; she would have liked to go on, but the cry for an advanced education was not imperative in her heart, and she had ambitions for the boys, and she did not think father could bear the added expense, and she did not see how mother could get along without her, so she staid at home.

The year after Hervey Meredith went to India

there came into the home a treasure—the sweetest, fairest flower of a baby girl that ever stepped foot this side of Heaven; so, at least, Rebecca thought, and indeed the Meredith household not only, but the neighborhood, agreed with her. Such lustrous eyes as Ailee had! such a sweet rosebud mouth, such winning ways which showed themselves at an unheard-of age. Perhaps it was because they were so busy worshipping her that they did not notice the mother's fading. At least Rebecca did not; she who had been part of her mother's life for so many years upbraided herself afterwards with the thought that she had been busy over the child, and let the mother slip away. Ailee was not quite eight months old when Rebecca bent over her and murmured through blinding tears, "I must be mother as well as sister to you now; she said so." It had been a very solemn parting, of course, and yet a very tender one. Rebecca, with her heart torn as it was with grief, all but crushed at times with the thought of her loss, yet felt soothed and strengthened as often as she looked at Ailee. Her mother had trusted her so utterly. "You are just the age that I was, daughter," she had said, "when I first held your brother Hervey in my arms. It was my birthday, I remember, and I was twenty-two. I am so glad you are not younger, now that you are called to be mother as well as sister to Ailee. It is God's call to you,

dearest, and I feel so safe leaving her in your arms." And feeling the touch of the little arms about her neck, Rebecca could not but be comforted after the mother had gone away; could not but feel that she had a wonderful life work before her. She must bring up Ailee as her mother would have done.

She had other work which all but bewildered her. Sometimes she looked on in dismay, and felt that she had not known her father. He had always been so grave, and so busy; preoccupied, indeed; she had not realized that he would mourn so for her mother. There were days when he was like one insane with sorrow, and she began to know what her mother meant when she said, "I look to you, daughter, to give your father the help he will sorely need when I am away." She had asked no questions then — she could not, for the tears which choked her; but in her heart had been a strange feeling of surprise that any one could suppose her father needed help. It was his life to help others. It almost startled her to discover how human he was. After a little it helped her to feel that he actually leaned on her.

"You certainly have a full life marked out before you," her brother wrote from India; "there will be no need for you ever to sit down and fold your hands and mourn that you are not wanted. Mac has just been reading to me a letter from his sister. He wanted my advice

professionally as to the possibility of having her come out to him here. He does not know how plainly I can read between the lines of the letter. The girl is one of those helpless, hopeless, discontented creatures, who imagines that she is not wanted here, or there, or anywhere. Indeed, from the tone of her letter it may be truth, and not imagination; some people contrive to be so full of themselves and their wrongs and aches, that it is hard to want them. What if our little Ailee and our precious father had to look to such as she for care and comfort! I am so glad, Rebecca, that you are what you are. I know you will be to father all that you can be, and I know that is saying a great deal. I am not surprised that he has broken down, as you say he has; characters like his, nearly always, I think, have some one person on whom they lean; and our mother was a strong-hearted woman; it was good to lean upon her. I am sure he needs your help, even more than you realize."

This letter helped Rebecca to be brave for her father as well as for Ailee, and thoughtful for him, and to try in all possible ways to comfort him. Perhaps it was this which made the next blow fall so keenly. She thought she had succeeded. He learned to come to her for all his small needs such as a woman's hand can supply; he learned to speak to her of his perplexities. He even told her, occasionally, as she discovered

he had been in the habit of telling her mother, about grave cases which caused him professional anxiety; she strove earnestly to be interested and sympathetic, and believed that she succeeded. After a little he ceased to talk with her in this way, and she told herself that he was getting used to the changed life, and was busier than ever, for a sickly season came upon them. Her thoughts, she remembered, were largely of Ailee that winter, and her father had less of her attention.

It was at the close of the winter, when Ailee had just passed her second birthday, that the blow fell which for a time seemed to stun her. Her father was going to be married! Going to bring a stranger home to take her mother's place. Sit at the head of the table where mother sat all those years, where she had sat since, bravely trying to do her work. A stranger to be a mother to Ailee — her Ailee. It was too terrible! She could not bear it! She lived through the storm of grief and injured pride and rebellion, in the secrecy of her own room. She made no scenes outside; she did not even let her father know that she disapproved — at least she thought she did not, though his lip had quivered for a moment when he said, "I am afraid it is a disappointment to you, Rebecca, and I wanted it to be a comfort." She made no answer to that appeal; she felt that she could not. A comfort to her to put a stranger in her mother's place. How could he! Oh! how

could he. Had she forgotten that dear face and form, even for an hour? How was it possible for her father to put another face there instead of it?

But all this, as I said, was in secret. Outsiders said to one another, "How well Rebecca Meredith takes the news. I suppose it is really a relief to her to think of having some one to share her care and responsibility." And one replied, "I presume it is; Rebecca is a very self-poised young woman, anyway. I don't think she feels things as deeply as some. I could not help noticing how quietly she took her mother's death." Thus much they knew about the almost breaking heart of the quiet girl.

The new Mrs. Meredith came. A dignified, lady-like woman, as unlike Rebecca's mother as two women who were refined and cultured could well be—one who knew what was due to her, and meant to maintain her dignity. At least that was what Rebecca saw in her. There was, I have said, no outward disturbance of any kind.

Rebecca was present at the home-coming of her father with his new wife. She received them with all the quiet grace that was natural to her, and administered to their comfort in all thoughtful ways. She did more than that; she stepped promptly out of the place of manager of the home which she had held so long and so well; there was found to be no need of hints or reminders. She ate her breakfast quietly, and made

no sign on the morning when Mrs. Meredith first took her mother's seat at the table. She answered cheerfully and fully all necessary questions in regard to household matters, and volunteered much information that was valuable. In short, no one could have found any fault with Rebecca's words or manner during those trying days, and all the while her heart felt like lead.

Only one place she kept to herself; she did not by so much as a glance intimate that she supposed the new-comer had any right or title in Ailee. Her careful, painstaking and remarkably judicious management of the child, all things considered, went on steadily; and as Ailee was a frail, peculiarly sensitive and withal very timid little child, no one disturbed their relations.

At first the new mother tried to win her, but Ailee clung with as silent and positive persistence to Rebecca, as Rebecca did to her; and as she needed special care, and her sister evidently knew how to give it, and wanted nothing so much as the opportunity, the wise new mother let them alone; and more and more, as the days passed, these two, child and woman, drew away from both father and mother, and drew closer to each other. They ate and slept in their father's house, and received all that was needed for their comfort at his careful hands; beyond that they saw almost nothing of him. He, on his part, was as busy as ever, perhaps busier than ever, for the over-

crowded tenements of the factory hands did not grow more sanitary as the days went on, and sickness increased. He was rarely at home during Ailee's waking hours, and when she was sleeping quietly Rebecca remembered that if her father was in the house Mrs. Meredith was with him, so she shaded the light from Ailee's eyes and wrote long letters to Hervey in India.

"I hope you want me," she wrote to him one night; "if you do not, I have nowhere to go, for Ailee is asleep, and father and Mrs. Meredith are sufficient to themselves; there is no room for me." Then she thought of "Mac's sister," the "hopeless, discontented creature who imagined that she was not wanted here, or there, or anywhere," and took a fresh sheet, leaving all that out. Hervey should not class her in any such list; she would bear her loneliness alone.

Life settled down into a routine with Rebecca. She saw less and less of father and step-mother; indeed, she saw little of anybody. She deliberately gave herself up to Ailee. As the years went by, and the little girl was nearing her fifth birthday, Rebecca found herself wondering, with a sharp pang at her heart, what she should do when the time came that Ailee must go to school. How would she get through the days without her? Then she held her close, and mentally resolved that schooldays should not begin for her very early. What better teacher did she need than her sister?

But Rebecca did not understand ; a better teacher was needed, and provision was being made. Suddenly the child sickened ; a sharp illness from the very first. Rebecca knew this by the sudden paling of her father's face, when he came in answer to her summons. A few terrible days followed, during which the father hung over his little daughter in an agony of effort to save her, and the wife hovered about, anxious to do something and not knowing what to do, for Ailee clung with all the passion of delirium to her sister ; would not, indeed, suffer her out of her sight. Then, like a great pall bearing down upon poor Rebecca, and shutting out light and hope together, the end came. Ailee lay quiet, at last, with her clinging arms dropped lifeless, and a rarely sweet look of mingled wonderment and rapture on her face, as if in that supreme moment, when she exchanged earth for Heaven, her eyes might have caught a glimpse of mother.

CHAPTER II.

OUT IN THE WORLD.

WHAT life was to Rebecca during the weeks and months which followed, I shrink from trying to tell you. At first she seemed stunned. People said of her again, "How very quietly she takes everything. It must be comfortable to be so self-poised that nothing overcomes her; but I had no idea when she was a girl that she was so cold-hearted." Yes, she had passed her twenty-seventh birthday, and people were already saying of her, "She did thus and so when she was a girl." It was true enough that nobody understood her. Mrs. Meredith wanted to be very kind and helpful. "Come into the library, my dear," she said to her one evening when Rebecca was slipping away to her room; "your father will be at home this evening, and we can have a comfortable time together."

Poor girl! that very word "comfortable" well-nigh cost her her self-control. No doubt they could be, with Ailee gone, for they had seen

very little of her in life ; but how could she, with empty arms and heart, sit in the library and be comfortable ?

This thought passed swiftly through her mind — a bitter thought ; for Rebecca, without knowing it, was growing bitter. She made no answer in words beyond a cold "Thank you ; I would rather not," and hurried away.

Mrs. Meredith sighed. "I cannot reach her, I am afraid, in any way," she said to her husband ; "she seems to shrink from me more and more as the months pass, instead of becoming used to it."

"I cannot understand her," the father said, and he spoke impatiently ; "Rebecca used to be a reasonable girl, and was never given to brooding, so far as I could see."

"She has had a crushing sorrow," said the step-mother, and her tone was kind, with 'an excusing element in it.

"Of course," the father said. "I feel for her ; but haven't we, too, been bereaved ? People ought not to be selfish in their grief."

He said "we" because the new Mrs. Meredith was really a part of himself ; and he felt that she suffered in his suffering. And he missed his little daughter in a way that Rebecca did not imagine. If she had half understood it would have made her own burden less hard.

Rebecca did try to be good. In the solitude of her own room that night she took herself to task

for being unreasonable. Of course Ailee was almost nothing to the step-mother; of course she could be comfortable without her. Why need the quiet truth stab her so? Not even to her father was Ailee in any sense what she was to her. Another time she would not be so foolish.

Acting upon this decision, she went, on the next evening when she knew her father to be at home, to the library, resolved to make one of the family party. Mrs. Meredith was in the midst of a sentence when she turned the knob of the door and quietly glided in. The sentence stopped midway and was never finished; and the droplight, shaded though it was, revealed on the step-mother's face a sudden look of — perhaps consternation, or at least dismay. She had interrupted a confidence. She had surprised them both; and though her father made a place for her at the table, and pushed an easy-chair forward for her use, she could not get away from the feeling that she was not wanted; that they were "comfortable" without her, and the step-mother, at least, uncomfortable in her presence. She made her stay quite short, and it was weeks before she could bring herself to try the experiment again.

After a time it became apparent to Rebecca Meredith herself that she could not live on in this way. Her days were purposeless, and her nights full of heart-breaking dreams, from which she awoke to miss her darling and cry herself to sleep. She

was growing morbid. Some change she must have, and that speedily, or she felt that her very reason might be imperiled. If she could only go away for a time. But there seemed no avenue open to her. She was singularly alone in the world. Her mother had been an only child, and her father's one brother was an officer in the navy, and made his headquarters abroad; she was not even acquainted with his family. She thought of India, and smiled bitterly to herself over the thought that here was another "creature" like "Mac's sister." No, of course she could not go to India. But the unrest, once admitted, grew upon her; strengthened until she felt sure that the limit of her endurance had been reached.

She tried to talk it over with her father, and found it the hardest thing she had ever done. He was utterly unsympathetic.

"I cannot understand," he said, and his voice was as cold as ice, "why a young woman in a comfortable home should feel such an intense desire to get away from it. What is it you need that you cannot have here?"

"It is not that, father," she said eagerly; "I have everything I need, of course. It is not a question of comfort at all, but of—why, of life, almost." She had not made it any plainer.

"Indeed!" he said; "I am as far from understanding the situation as ever. If you were seventeen, or given to heroics, I would know how to

treat you, but as it is — I really don't know what to think. This is not a wonderfully interesting part of the town, I am aware, but your mother and I contrive to get along in it, and have a reasonably comfortable time; I do not know why you cannot do the same."

Her face flamed at the word "mother." She had never used it save to the mother in Heaven. To outsiders she said "Mrs. Meredith"; in the home she had most of the time contrived to avoid any direct address. Also she hated the word "comfortable." What constant use was made of it in these days when it did not fit. But she tried to make her meaning plain. She thought she needed a change; if she could go away for a few months, or even weeks, she was sure it would help her. If he only understood what it was to her to be without Ailee. But he drew a long sigh and said, "We have to do without her." If he had said "I" instead of "we" it would have helped her more, or hurt her less; as it was, she winced.

"Well," he said, after another pause, and he spoke in a slow, sad tone, "I do not in the least know what to do for you. It is only too apparent that you are unhappy at home, but I do not know where to send you. If we had family friends it would be different; but you know how alone we are in the world, and I am by no means able to send you away to a place of resort. I am a poor man, Rebecca" — another sigh, and the lines on

his face seemed to deepen — “a much poorer man than you probably suppose. Your brother’s education and fitting out were expensive, and sickness is always, of course, a heavy drain on the purse, even in a physician’s family.”

He did not say death was expensive, but Rebecca knew it was, and it seemed to her there had been so many deaths in their family! He went on to say that there had also been losses of which she knew nothing; he had not thought it worth while to trouble her with them — not heavy losses, of course, because he had not a great deal to lose. He had never been able to save much in his profession; some men did, he hardly knew how, there were so many ways to spend money, and so many sick people were also poor people.

Rebecca sat before this idea appalled for a moment. It was actually new to her. Of course they were not what people called wealthy — she had always known that; but there had been heretofore enough with which to do what they would. She had hardly given a thought to the money part of the question. She looked again at her father, and he seemed older than she had thought him; perhaps he was wearing himself out to support his new wife and her. It crossed her mind that marriage, too, was expensive, as well as death; there had to be so many new things in the home before the stranger came; but she would not for the world have given utterance to the thought.

Instead, she said, "Never mind, father; if you cannot afford me a few months of change, I can get along without it; I had not realized that it would take more money than it would to have me at home; in fact, I did not think anything about money."

Then she went away, telling herself that she had given it all up. But before that day was done she knew she had not. In fact, she assured herself that she could not breathe in that house any more.

Her plans, however, took a different form. Why should she not earn her own living? Since her father was comparatively a poor man, it seemed eminently proper that she should. This idea finally took possession of her and was urged persistently. Her father utterly disapproved, but his very manner of showing this strengthened her determination. "What in the world could you do?" he asked, and he did not mean that a hint of almost a sneer should accompany the question; but that was the way it sounded to Rebecca. She flushed under it, yet admitted to herself that the question was but natural. She had not a finished education, although a very fair one. She had not been trained to teach, and the modern methods of imparting instruction were unfamiliar to her. This she fully realized, and she had, after careful consideration, abandoned the idea of teaching. But she did not like to have her father

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Speak as though this very natural way of earning a living were closed to her.

"There must be some work in the world which I am capable of doing," she said, and she knew that she spoke coldly.

"Oh! I do not doubt it; there is work in your own home which you are entirely capable of doing, without going out in the world at all. I have often thought that your mother was overtaxed with the cares of housekeeping, and the family mending, and so forth. It seems to me there is quite enough, especially in the family of a physician, to keep two women as busily employed as is good for them."

Rebecca had absolutely no reply to make to this. Her father took two or three turns up and down the room, then stopped before her and spoke more gently.

"Rebecca, if what I said to you not long ago about my circumstances, has led you to think you ought to take such a step as this, I hope you will reconsider. I am by no means a rich man, as I said, and to send you away from home for any length of time to a place where you would like to stay would embarrass me somewhat, but I am entirely able to support my family at home, and I am glad to assure you that any scheme for earning your own living is quite unnecessary. Can you not be content to stay with us, daughter?"

If he had only said "stay with me." Yet cer-

tainly she did not want him to ignore his wife, now that he had a wife. She felt the tears gathering in her eyes; she felt her heart beating rapidly. She felt, oh! so sorely tempted to say to him, "You were not content to stay with me; you sought out some one else and left me outside." But she held herself from saying it. She did not want to hurt her father. The only words she gave to him were:

"I am not — needed at home, father." She made a marked pause before the word "needed"; she had almost said "wanted." Then her father turned from her again, impatiently this time.

"Well, Rebecca, you are your own mistress, of course. I have no legal control over you; and I certainly should not force you to stay if I could. You must do what you think is right."

It was sore work; it had been harder to plan for herself than she had supposed; but she persisted. By dint of persevering effort she secured a position as trimmer in a fashionable dressmaking establishment in a distant city. The wages offered barely paid her board, but she had had difficulty enough in obtaining even this opening to help her to realize how crowded the world was. But it might be a stepping-stone to something better. "At least I can sew," she had told her father half-proudly. "I've made my own dresses since I was fifteen, and I know people in this town who would like to employ me to make theirs."

Her father was hurt and indignant. He could not help saying some things which hurt his daughter. It was the step-mother who at last made the way smoother for her.

"I really think, Doctor, it would be wiser in you to yield to Rebecca's wishes in this matter. I can see that her heart is quite set upon it, and it will be so much better for her to feel that she goes from home with your approval. After all, it is quite natural that she should want to see a little of the world. She has been sheltered longer than girls generally are, you know. Besides, it will not last long; she will find the world a very different place from what she imagines, and will be glad enough to get home again."

Dr. Meredith had moved himself impatiently in his chair, and even given the household cat a slight kick with his slippered foot to show his intense irritation, as he replied:

"If she were going about any work fitted to her position or tastes, it would be less unreasonable; but I must say I do not relish the thought of my daughter becoming a dressmaker."

"I know, but there is really nothing disgraceful in the attempt; there is not the slightest danger that she will succeed. A few months of steady labor in a city workroom will be sure to cure the disease. Meantime, she will be gaining skill which will help her in her own dressmaking, and that is not a bad idea. I used to say that if I

ever had a daughter she should go to one of the best dressmakers to be found and learn to sew. It gives one such a sense of independence to be able to do for one's self in such matters."

So the doctor was silenced, if not convinced, and the daughter went out from her home without further words of disapproval, but with the knowledge in her heart that her father strongly disapproved. She knew also that Mrs. Meredith believed she would soon grow weary of her "fit of independence" and return; and had said so with a superior smile to some of her friends. This made the girl resolve to endure tortures rather than do so.

But it was hard work — much harder than she had supposed. "Madame," the dressmaker, with a French name and a shrewd New England origin, was so intensely and persistently selfish and keen and cold that Rebecca shrank daily from contact with her.

Her companions in the large workrooms were by no means from the class of girls to which she had been accustomed. They talked and laughed about things whose mere mention made her blush. Constantly they were coarse, often shockingly irreverent, and sometimes positively low. Nor were they any better pleased with her company than she was with theirs. There were times when they seemed to exert themselves to say and do what they knew would shock her, for the mere

pleasure of making her wince. At other times they whispered over their work with evident determination to shut her out from possible fellowship. They called her "the old girl," and meant it. To them she seemed very old, for they, poor things, were quite young, and ought to have been under the sheltering care of home and mother. Rebecca overheard the name, one morning, as they meant she should. She gave no sign at the time, but she studied her twenty-inch mirror very carefully that evening, and wondered if she really were old; with all her brooding she had not thought of that before.

Well, the winter passed, and Rebecca lived through it, and the spring which followed, and staid in town during the brief vacation, partly because she could not afford the expense of going home, and partly because she shrank from going. She had endured the miseries of that stuffy room during all the stifling summer nights, and shivered in it through the dreary autumn ones, being glad that it held her only during the nights, for the workroom was at least pleasanter than it. But now for two weeks it had held her by daylight as well — at least when she was not plodding wearily through the streets in search of work.

For Rebecca Meredith had been discharged. She said that word over to herself the first day and laughed; it seemed so strange to apply it to her. She thought it was because she had quietly

but firmly persisted in correcting the "Madame" when she made a mistake in a bill. That may have been the immediate occasion, for Madame did not like to be corrected, especially in her bills; but the actual fact was that one of her old hands had returned, after long illness, recovered, and ready for service. One who was more accommodating than Rebecca; who was willing to sew later on occasion, never being afraid to go home after dark, which Rebecca was, and when they were hard pressed she could even sew for an hour or two early on Sunday morning, without looking appalled over the mere idea of it. More than that, the girls liked her; and as there was place in the sewing-room for but one of them, she was chosen as the one. On this dreary November evening, therefore, Rebecca sat alone in her dreary room, face to face with the grim facts that she had paid out her last money for last week's board; that there was a hole in her walking-shoes, and that she had no work in prospect.

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CHAPTER III.

BUSINESS CHANGES.

NOW what was to be done? Should she go home and admit herself vanquished and face Mrs. Meredith's superior smile? The thought was not to be borne; for other reasons, however, than this weak one. Her father had perhaps not grown reconciled to the idea of her earning her own living, but he chafed less under it than he used. In his last letter to her—he wrote but rarely, being a very busy man not given to letter-writing; but in response to one of her fortnightly epistles which she regularly sent he had written:

"In these precarious times, when each morning's paper chronicles a fresh bank failure—and this morning it is one which has a few hundreds of my hard-earned money—I find I chafe less at the thought of your learning a business which might perhaps support you if worse should come to worst with us. At the same time I have not grown accustomed to your absence, and still be-

lieve that your best place is at home." This was all the father said to her about losses.

But in a letter from India, received very soon thereafter, Hervey wrote: "Rebecca, I begin to realize how truly noble you have been in your flight into independence. I am afraid father is greatly burdened; he wrote me of quite a heavy loss, for him, early in the spring; and now this later one, and a fear of others following, I can see is a weight upon him. Poor father! he has worked hard enough for this ungrateful world to be better paid than he is. I have been troubled over the thought of your absence from the home nest—I can never think of you as old enough and wise enough to care for yourself; you seem always my little sister—but I begin to understand how the matter looked to you: you wanted to relieve our father of the thought that he might leave you without resources of your own for earning a living. And though I trust that your brother could do for you all that was needful, at the same time I realize what you meant to do for father by the step you took, and I honor you. Not every girl would have done it. Considering herself unfitted for a teacher, the average girl would have folded her hands and sighed, and wished she could do something in keeping with her position in society. I honor you, dear, let me say it again, for being above such petty ideas."

This praise had been very sweet to Rebecca,

albeit she knew that she only half-deserved it. It made her feel quite sure that she would not go home and own herself defeated; not at least until she had made vigorous effort to secure work. But, at the end of two weeks of effort she sat in weariness and discouragement, admitting to herself that perhaps she would have to give up. It was surprising, with so many dressmaking establishments in the great city, and such a rush of work as nearly all of them complained of, that there should be found no opening for her.

She seemed to have come upon the scene just after every "Want" in this department had been supplied. The morning paper lay in her lap with a list of "Wants" carefully marked. This she had done the evening before, and all day had patiently trudged from number to number only to find herself either too late or unable to do the particular sort of work which was needed. Her stay at "Madame's" had not been exceedingly helpful to her in the way of independent dress-making. She had been held closely to one branch of the work, and that an unimportant one so far as acquiring general skill was concerned.

As she sat drearily considering what was to be done next, her eyes rested on an advertisement:

WANTED — A young woman who has had experience with children, to take the entire care of a child three years of age. Call between the hours of four and six, at No. 1200 Carroll Avenue."

Rebecca,

What if she should apply? The blood rolled in waves over her face at the mere thought. Dr. Meredith's daughter a nurse-girl! Well, why not? There were times when she so sorely missed the clinging arms of Ailee that she felt she would hail it as a relief to have a child to care for and caress. Why should such work be considered lower in the social scale than dress-making, for instance?

She knew there was a recognized difference. There was Miss Simmons, the dressmaker who "sewed around;" she had been for weeks together at her father's table, served as one of them; and Mrs. Meredith introduced her to those who chanced to come in contact with her as "Miss Simmons." While Katie, Mrs. Porter's nurse-girl, never thought of sitting at the table with the family when Mrs. Porter was spending the day, or of being addressed as "Miss Carter." Then she remembered that customs differed in large cities.

The girls at "Madame's" had no such standing anywhere as had her old friend Miss Simmons. And had not Madame once addressed her as "Meredith," without any prefix? To be sure she had done it but once. Rebecca felt certain that her face must have expressed something of the effect which it had upon her; but it revealed the condition of things socially.

In truth, Rebecca had suffered a keener revela-

tion than that. The Dorrance girls had been in the workroom one morning, giving some special directions about their ruffles, and the older one had turned and stared at her in a most offensive way, without a sign of recognition. This experience had made the sewing-girl's face burn all the morning. How well she remembered the last time she had seen the Dorrance girls. She had been introduced to them when she called at Dr. Perry's, and had met them the next afternoon hurrying breathlessly along the slippery pavements, their delicate dresses and new spring hats caught in an April shower, and she had turned the heads of her father's horses which she was driving from the station for him, and taken them in and set them down at Dr. Perry's door, they profuse in their thanks. Now, because she was a sewing-girl in the Madame's employ, they would not even recognize her by a passing bow.

Rebecca was mistaken. If the Dorrance girls had remembered her they would have gone forward with smiles and bows, and asked after her health, and where she was staying in town. They belonged to that type of girls. What Miss Dorrance said as soon as she was out of the room was, "Where have I seen that girl? Didn't you notice her, Nannie? We have certainly met her somewhere." And Nannie had answered carelessly, "I did not notice her; perhaps she has brought work home for us."

It may be that this little episode, not understood by Rebecca, helped her to a decision. Since she had lost her place in the world, what did it matter whether she was seamstress or nurse-girl? She read the notice again, her eyes filling with tears as she did so. "That means," she told herself, "that the mother is dead, and there is probably a step-mother. No child would be left to the 'sole care' of a nurse except under those circumstances." You will observe by this that she had large knowledge of the world! Her own conception of the case so worked upon her, together with a line which she received by the morning's mail from Mrs. Meredith, that precisely at four o'clock she rang the bell at 1200 Carroll Avenue.

Mrs. Meredith had written, "Your father wishes me to answer your note, giving you the inclosed recipe, and sending his love. He is so harassed during these trying days that you must not expect many letters. Dorn & Halsey have failed; their doors were closed yesterday. Your father had but a couple of hundred dollars against them, but he felt sure of them, and every little helps, you know."

After that Rebecca was sure she would not go home. But she wondered bitterly whether Mrs. Meredith kept a careful outlook for all failures, and caused a herald of some sort to be sent to her. It was quite time for Rebecca Meredith to have another change; she was growing very bitter.

It was nearly five o'clock when Mr. Deane McKenzie applied his latch-key, and let himself into the handsome house at 1200 Carroll Avenue. Rogers, who was never far away when Mr. McKenzie was in the house, came forward with noiseless step to meet him

"Well, Rogers," he said, as that individual received at his hands the overcoat which the surly November day made necessary, "has all gone as usual to-day?"

"About as usual, sir. There is a person waiting to see you on business; I had her wait in the dining-room, because I was not sure whether you would wish to see her to-night."

"Not an applicant, Rogers?"

"Yes, sir; she had only yesterday's paper, and did not know the change of hours; but she had come some distance—from quite down town—and seemed anxious, and I thought perhaps"—and here Rogers paused, as though uncertain whether it would be well to tell all he thought.

"Very well," said his master, "I may as well see her, I suppose, though she does not appear to be very business-like, coming at the wrong hour. You may show her into the library, Rogers, as soon as I have glanced over my mail."

"There are several telegrams, sir."

"Are there? Then I must attend to them first." And the great man strode on into his elegant library, and sank wearily among the leather

cushions of his easy-chair. He dropped his face into both hands for an instant and yawned, like one who is exhausted, then sat upright and drew the yellow-enveloped messengers before him, tearing them open, one after another, not with the air of one who was nervous as to the news they might bring, but rather as a man used to dispatching business of all kinds with great rapidity. While he read the third one he touched his bell. Rogers was at his side almost before its tinkle had sounded. "Send Dick to me, Rogers; tell him to be ready to take a message to the office. And have the carriage ready for me directly after dinner; I find I must go back down town. You may as well let the young woman come in now; I shall have no other time to see her. The letters, I think, can wait." He glanced at their superscriptions as he spoke; then, seizing a dispatch blank, he wrote rapidly, tore open one of the letters, took in its contents at a single glance, and was writing on another blank when Rogers returned, followed by Rebecca Meredith.

"One moment," he said to Rogers, without looking up. "Here is another message for Dick, and it must go to the down-town office. Tell him to make all speed. And cook may hurry the dinner a little; I have less time than I thought. Now my good — I beg your pardon," and Mr. McKenzie rose to his feet with a surprised and courteous bow. His orders had been issued to Rogers while

he wrote, and he had wheeled about in his chair with a "Now, my good" — girl, he had meant to say, before he glanced in Rebecca's direction. She was dressed in the plainest of street costumes, but there was something about it and herself which was so utterly unlike what the business man had expected to meet, that he acknowledged it as I have said.

"I beg your pardon; there is some mistake. I thought there was a person waiting for me who had answered my advertisement for help."

"I am that person," said Rebecca, and Mrs. Meredith would have seen that she had lost no whit of her dignity. "I am Rebecca Meredith, and I come in response to your advertisement for a child's nurse. I would be glad to secure the place, if I could."

Mr. McKenzie was a business man. It took him but a moment to discover that this was business, however unlike it in exterior it might appear; he resumed his seat with a courteous "Very well, be seated; have you had experience with children?"

Rebecca, with rigid self-control, held her lips from quivering while she explained what her experience had been. He did not spare her in the least. He was courteous — as much so as he could have been to any person — but he was business-like. He asked numberless questions, about her health, her habits of life, her theories with regard to children.

"I may seem over-particular," he said at last, with a faint smile, "but I have to be. It is a position of grave responsibility. I must have a nurse who can in all respects be trusted. My Lilian is peculiarly situated; her mother is—an invalid."

He made so long and marked a pause before he completed this simple statement that Rebecca was fairly startled. Surely children had had invalid mothers before; such a state of things was not so unusual, yet his manner was certainly peculiar. He did not seem to be noting the effect of his words upon her, but rather considering what he should say next; or, as it seemed to Rebecca, how much he should leave unsaid.

"I had to send away her other nurse," he remarked, fixing his keen eyes on his caller, "because I could not trust her, and it was a great grief to Lilian; she was attached to her. She is a hard child to manage; she has inherited—diseased nerves. I am a very busy man, compelled by the necessities of my business to be away from home most of the time. I cannot, in the nature of things, do for my child as I would, and therefore the responsibility involved in securing a nurse. There have been, I should think, fifty applicants since I advertised; but there was not one of whom I thought for a moment. If you had had more experience I should be tempted to—but a home experience is sometimes better than

any other, and sometimes not. I beg your pardon for speaking so plainly," with another grave attempt at a smile, "or rather for thinking aloud before you; but I must do my best for my child."

"I do not think" — began Rebecca, and she arose as she did so. Her sentence was to have been, "I do not think I could suit you. I have had no experience save with my one little sister, and I should not like to assume so great a responsibility as you suggest." But she did not finish the sentence. The door was pushed open very softly, and a vision of loveliness peeped in. A fair little girl all in soft, fleecy white, with a face like an angel's, and framed in gold — for the short curls which clustered about her head were the color of the sunlight on an Indian summer day.

"Papa," said the sweetest of baby voices, and his reply was prompt:

"Ah, my darling! come here." She sprang forward into his arms, and then were exchanged some of the most extravagantly loving kisses Rebecca had seen in months. She could scarcely see now for the tears which would come. How often had Ailee, after ever so brief an absence, bounded into her arms, and clung as this child was clinging now. She felt an almost irresistible longing to snatch her from the father's arms and cry, "Give me some of them, or my heart will break." She held herself silent and motionless until the father, still with his child in his arms,

turned toward her. "I must beg your pardon again; this is very unbusiness-like. It has all been a somewhat unbusiness-like interview. You do not seem to me like the usual professional applicants; and, excuse me, I hardly feel that you are suited to the position. I mean, you look and act above it; but you should know best."

"I will do my best to prove my fitness for the place if you care to try me," was Rebecca's humble answer. In that little moment of time she had decided that she could not live longer without this child's love.

"Lilian," said her father, bending over the little girl, whose great beautiful eyes were fixed upon Rebecca, "should you like to have this — woman come here and take care of you?" He evidently hesitated for a word, but finally chose "woman."

Lilian looked and looked, all her soul in her eyes. Suddenly she gave a bound forward and landed in Rebecca's outstretched arms.

"I love 'oo," she said, and the sweet lips were pressed close to the woman's trembling ones.

"That settles it," the father said, and there was a decided smile on his face.

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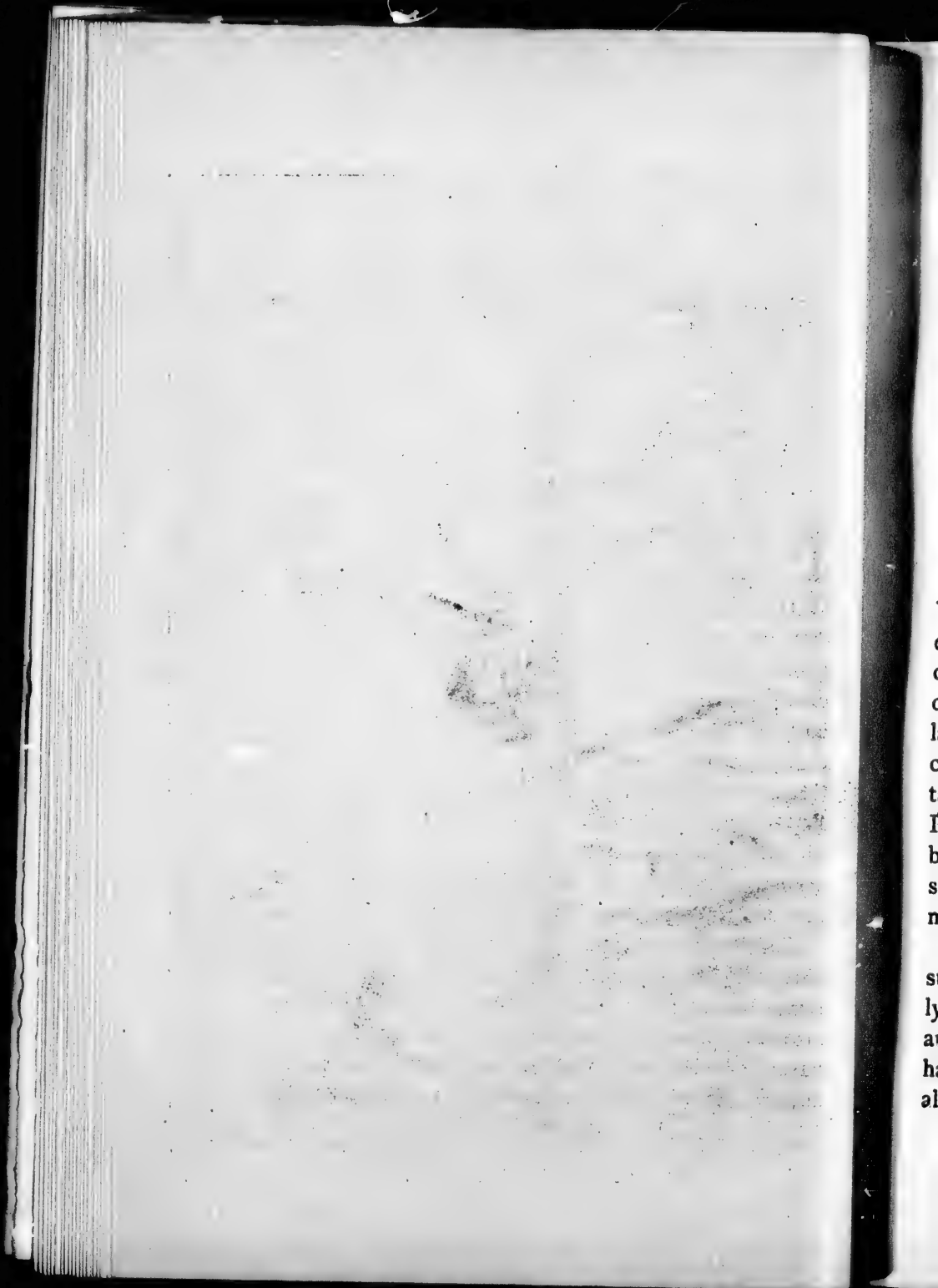
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CHAPTER IV.

UNDER ORDERS.

IT was New Year's evening, bitterly cold and with a fierce northeast storm raging outside. Within the luxurious room where Rebecca Meredith sat, one would not have imagined that there could be discomfort of any sort. A very treasure of a room was this — the private apartment of the lady of the house, Mrs. McKenzie. Somebody, certainly, had not only luxurious, but exquisite tastes, and had given full play to their indulgence. Paper, and carpet, and upholstery, and hangings, blended charmingly, and were all of that indescribable mingling of colors which suggests summer and sunshine, however wintry or dark the day.

The central figure in the room matched the surroundings wonderfully well. Mrs. McKenzie, lying back among the cushions of a great billowy arm-chair, her daintily slippered feet resting on a hassock which set off their daintiness; her slight, almost girlish form arrayed in a pale-blue tea-

gown trimmed with soft white fur; her hair, which was nearly the color of her little daughter's, clustering in curls about her temples, looked this evening almost younger than Rebecca Meredith, who occupied the reading-chair near at hand. Yet there were a dozen years between them.

A very busy and in some respects unique life had Rebecca Meredith led since that November evening some weeks ago, in which she engaged to enter Mr. McKenzie's family as nurse. So far as comfort in outward surroundings was concerned she had been greatly the gainer. Mr. McKenzie had named a sum, to be paid her monthly, which would have made "Madame" stare; and as for her room, the stuffy little fourth-floor back would have been appalled by her present surroundings. She shared the large, bright, elegantly appointed room here with Lilian—but there was ample space for two—and a sweeter, brighter room-mate one could not have desired. As to board, the girl had endured tortures in the afore-said boarding-house—not altogether on account of the quality and quantity of food, but also because of the manner of serving it. She had been dainty in her tastes in these directions from a child, and her father's well-appointed table had fostered such tastes.

In Mr. McKenzie's house the most expensive luxuries of the season were freely served, and all the appointments of the dining-room were on a

luxurious scale. Silver and china and napery, such as the good doctor's house had never known, were now her daily portion. It is true that she and the housekeeper, and Mrs. McKenzie's nurse took their meals together, after the master of the house had been served, but they were served as freely and with as much care as he was himself.

In short, Rebecca had learned what American girls seem so slow in learning, that the comforts of home and fair-living wages can be had in a private house, with work to give in return, less wearing to brain and body than that which is often paid for in the starvation wages which must yet furnish attic rooms and fourth-rate board. But then, while I write the sentence, I feel that it is useless to wage war upon these ideas. The difficulty was voiced by a keen-brained girl to whom I talked of this thing not long ago.

"My dear madam," she said, "don't you know that the average girl will continue to stand behind a counter ten or even twelve hours in a day, and endure rudeness from customer and cash-boy, and sleep in an attic, and eat sour bread and stale vegetables year in and year out rather than live in comparative luxury and eat at that second table? They belong to the first table in their boarding-house, if it is fourth-rate, and that means a great deal." I suppose it does; but I am glad that there are a few girls like Rebecca Meredith who are superior even to this.

As for the Meredith family, she had spared their feelings by being meager in her details. She had changed her boarding-house — that was sufficient surely, for them to know. Her father was not acquainted with the city, and remained in ignorance of what a change it was from No. 76 Eighth Street to No. 1200 Carroll Avenue. There was no need to say anything about her occupation — it was respectable and she was better paid, and was saving money; a thing which could never have happened at Madame's. Nobody knew her, so the Meredith pride need not feel itself hurt.

But there were unpleasantnesses connected with her present life. In the first place, the chambermaid seemed to resent the idea of Rebecca sitting at the housekeeper's table, and lost no opportunity to toss her head and curl her lip at the offender; she even muttered occasionally something about "stuck-ups who thought themselves better than common people." To be sure, this was a very small matter indeed to Rebecca; she gave the girl almost as little thought as she would have given to an offending fly — but even a fly can annoy. There was a graver unpleasantness than this, and one which grew upon her. She had conceived a decided, almost an intense dislike for the master of this great, handsome house, and there was something about Rebecca which made her shrink from receiving her daily bread at the hands of one whom she disliked.

It is true she rarely saw him; an occasional passing of each other on the stairs, at which time he recognized her existence by the gravest of bows; an occasional glimpse of him seated in his library chair when she went to open the door for Lilian to make her daily visit — this was almost the extent of their intercourse; for the rest he contented himself generally with brief notes in which he gave explicit and evidently carefully planned directions concerning Lilian, and not a word else. Yet, as I said, her dislike for him was deepening. Perhaps it had its start on the day of that first interview with him, after it had been decided that she should try the situation. He had toyed for a single instant with his paper-knife, as a nervous man might have done; he had said to Rogers who reminded him that dinner was served, "Yes; I will be out in a moment," then he had dropped the knife and wheeled around again to Rebecca.

"Did I understand that you could come in the morning? My mornings are very much crowded with business; I must, therefore, take a few moments of your time at once, to make some statements. As a rule, I try to give this hour of the day to my daughter; I shall wish you to have her ready to join me here about five o'clock. I desire you to come with her to the door, then you may retire until I ring for the child to be taken away. If for any reason I am detained, or

must be otherwise engaged, I shall wish you to keep the child with you ; and at all other hours of the day I shall expect you to have her in your immediate presence. When she goes in to spend a little time with her mother it is my desire that you should go also."

Up to this point Rebecca had listened in silence. The directions were absurdly explicit, she thought, and presupposed that she knew nothing about the work which she had engaged to do ; but perhaps men did not know any better than to talk in that way to women. Why did he not let his wife give the necessary orders ? This train of thought, which she carried on as she listened, was suddenly broken in upon by that last surprising direction. So the mother was not to be permitted to see her child except in the presence of a third person !

She interrupted the rapid utterances.

"Excuse me. What if the mother desires me to retire and leave her child with her ?"

"In that case you are to state that you have orders from the child's father not to have her out of your sight."

Rebecca listened, dumfounded. This was responsibility indeed. A sudden explanation flashed over her mind. It must be that the mother was insane, and that he feared to leave the little one alone with her. But if such were the case why did he not say so ? How absurd, as well as cruel, to try to keep her in ignorance of such a condition

of things, when of course she must find it out for herself as soon as she came in contact with the mother. For a moment she felt that she must ask to be released from the engagement she had made; she shrank unutterably from having anything to do with an insane person. But the thought of Lilian and the kisses she had bestowed made her hesitate, and gave Mr. McKenzie time to continue.

"We need not borrow trouble, Miss — by the way, what is your name?"

Rebecca had nearly said "Miss Meredith," but remembered the customs of her present position in time, and with an added flush on her face answered:

"Rebecca Meredith."

"Thank you. I was about to say, Rebecca, that we need not borrow trouble; we shall find enough of it, unsought, along the way. Probably the child's mother will not ask you to leave your charge; she understands my wishes in the matter quite well. But if she does I shall expect you to obey my orders. I told you I was obliged to discharge your predecessor because I could not trust her. I expect to be able to trust you."

This might have been intended as a compliment, but Rebecca felt almost as though she had been insulted. She began then to dislike the grave, self-sustained man who could talk about his wife as though she were merely another person in

his employ. She assured herself that he would have shown more heart, as well as more common sense, by confiding to her a great sorrow, if the woman were really not in her right mind, and trusting her to do the best she could to help them bear such a burden. His next sentence added to her indignation and dismay.

"Moreover, Rebecca, I shall have to ask you to be kind enough not to execute any commissions which any members of my family may wish to intrust to you. Mrs. McKenzie, for instance, has a woman whose sole duty it is to attend her, and who understands all her needs; but she is sometimes — thoughtless in regard to the duties of others, and may ask a service of you which you ought not to have to perform."

Can you not excuse Rebecca for feeling indignant? Here was certainly a very strange condition of things. If Mr. McKenzie felt it necessary to confide in a stranger to this extent, why did not courtesy and common sense suggest to him that he ought to go further?

He gave her no opportunity to frame a reply, and evidently expected none. He had risen while speaking the last sentence.

"I find myself very much cramped for time, and expect to be even unusually hurried to-morrow, therefore I felt it necessary to give these directions to-night. As to your duties, the housekeeper is entirely reliable, and will give you all the informa-

tion you need for the present. Now I shall have to bid you good-evening."

Rebecca, too, had risen, and he had himself bowed her to the door, even while she was trying to frame a sentence which should tell him that she could not enter so mysterious a household, and take such disagreeable duties upon her. How utterly unnecessary, too, were his precautions. What harm could it do to humor the fancies of a poor, diseased brain, and let any one she happened to choose execute, or seem to execute, her commissions for her?

The newly-engaged nurse went back to her boarding-house in a fume, and spent half the night wondering, planning and regretting. But the next morning she bade good-by to the fourth-story back, and went to 1200 Carroll Avenue.

She had lunched in state with the housekeeper and a dignified-looking middle-aged woman who was addressed as "nurse," and was trying to find her way through the intricacies of Lilian's wardrobe, which had been promptly intrusted to her, when there came a summons which made her heart beat faster.

"Mrs. McKenzie would like to see you, ma'am, and you are to bring Miss Lilian with you, if you please."

It was Dick, the errand-boy, who brought this word, and he waited for no reply, else Rebecca would have begged him to show her the way to

Mrs. McKenzie's room. Truth to tell, she was in a nervous tremor, and was almost tempted to call after the boy and ask his protection. However, she scolded herself roundly for allowing her foolish fears to get control of her common sense. Of course there was no danger, else they would not allow her, an utter stranger, to take the child and go unattended into its presence. Lilian was absorbed at that moment with a fresh dollie which had been found by her side when she awakened in the morning, and which the housekeeper said had been left for her with "Papa's dear love"; but she came at once in response to Rebecca's call, and expressed great delight over the thought of a visit to mamma. A clear, sweet voice had responded to Rebecca's knock, inviting them to enter, and no sooner was the door opened than the child sprang to the arms of her mother with quite as extravagant expressions of delight as she had shown to her father the evening before. As for the mother, she almost devoured the baby with kisses, then turned to Rebecca with a bright face.

"How do you do, my dear? Lilian has almost made me forget to welcome you; but, indeed, I am glad to see you, and interested in you above measure. The one who cares especially for my little girl has always a warm place in my heart, and Mr. McKenzie prepared me to like you. He is pleased with your appearance, my dear. I hope he will remain so, for he is very fastidious, and

especially hard to please where Lilian is concerned ; and people who do not please him do not stay very long."

She shrugged her shapely shoulders as she spoke, and laughed a sweet, silvery laugh, then invited Rebecca to be seated, and while she fondled Lilian, asked questions in a much more intelligent manner, Rebecca thought, than her husband had done, and withal was considerate and kind even to tenderness.

"Poor child!" she said, "so you are motherless. It is very hard to lose a mother ; one never grows accustomed to it. I lost mine twenty years ago, and I miss her yet — too bitterly sometimes. There is nobody quite like a mother, especially to an invalid. I suppose they have told you I am that? I don't look it, do I? But I am a great sufferer sometimes, and never to be depended upon, because the attacks may seize me at any moment. That is why I have to intrust my little darling here so constantly to the care of others. But you will be good to her, I know you will ; my heart warms to you, dear."

As for Rebecca, her heart was utterly lost. This sweet-faced, sweet-voiced, beautiful woman who smiled upon her so graciously was the most winsome creature she had ever seen. There was not a trace of insanity, or even of nervousness, in face or manner. Her eyes were full of a kindly light, and every movement was graceful and re-

poseful. What could Mr. McKenzie have meant? The indignation which Rebecca had felt the evening before returned in full force. How insulting in a man to speak to an entire stranger in the way he did of his wife! What possible objection could there be to leaving Lilian to her caresses for as long a time as she desired? But worse than that had been the injunction not to perform any service for this lovely lady.

"I suppose," said Rebecca to herself, "it was his way of showing, or professing to show, consideration for his hired help, or else he is considering himself. Perhaps his wife, shut into her room a great deal by suffering, sometimes in thoughtlessness asks services which inconvenience His Majesty, so he proposes to guard himself at the very commencement from any annoyances of that kind coming through me. That must be the explanation. How horribly selfish and intolerable! I hope she does not know how he speaks of her. I despise that man!"

CHAPTER V.

BEWILDERMENT.

AS I have said, this feeling deepened rather than lessened with Rebecca as the weeks went by, and she came more and more under the influence of Mrs. McKenzie. That lady was so uniformly sweet and thoughtful and motherly, and Lilian was so unquestionably fond of her, that Rebecca, studying the problem, sometimes decided that it was very plain what the answer was. Mr. McKenzie was a majestic bundle of selfishness, who had but one love in all this great world, and that was his little daughter. For the rest, his heart was wedded to his everlasting business. If he had ever loved his wife, that time was evidently long past. Probably he had grown impatient of her frequent periods of invalidism, when she could neither attend to household duties nor devote herself to his comfort, and had steadily drawn away from her.

"He looks and acts like a man who would have

no sympathy with suffering of any sort," said Rebecca to herself, half fiercely. Yet that very evening, when she felt in honor bound to report Lilian as slightly hoarse, he left two men waiting for him in the library and came himself to the nursery, bending over Lilian with all the solicitude and tenderness of a mother, even waiting to see the cold compress applied to her throat, and arranging the flannel covering. He came again when the doctor, for whom he had promptly telephoned, responded, and administered with his own hand the medicine ordered. Even after the doctor had made light of fears and gone his way, the father sat with his finger on Lilian's small wrist, and counted the beats skillfully and anxiously. Oh! he had evidently heart enough where Lilian was concerned, and infinite sympathy for any touch of suffering which affected her. "It is a case of idol worship," Rebecca told herself, "but how strange and sad that he has bestowed it all on the baby, and has none left for the lovely mother!"

Mr. McKenzie had not been mistaken in his estimate of Rebecca. He could trust her; however she might disapprove of his orders, she obeyed them. Feeling ashamed of herself for doing so, feeling the blood sometimes mount to her forehead as she presented herself always at the door of Mrs. McKenzie's room when Lilian was sent for, she yet never thought of doing otherwise. The lady referred to it one day, playfully.

"My dear, you are faithful, are you not?" It was just after she had said with apparent carelessness, "You can leave Lilian with me, if you choose, while you go down to supervise the making of her toast," and Rebecca had answered, flushing, "Thank you, it will not be necessary. I have only to tell cook how I want it done and she will attend to it." Then Mrs. McKenzie had laughed and made that playful response, "My dear, you are faithful, are you not?" Seeing Rebecca's evident embarrassment, she had made haste to add, "Oh! you need not feel badly about it; I am glad that you are. I like you very much, and fully recognize the importance of your pleasing Mr. McKenzie. There have been several before you who failed in this respect. My poor little Lilian has had a number of faithful nurses whom she loved, who yet could not seem to remember certain very peculiar directions. I have been sorry for her; she and I do not like changes when they separate us from those we love. You see, I understand my husband's little peculiarities, Rebecca. Do not let them prejudice you against him; he is a good man, despite his whims. All men have them of one sort or another, I fancy. He is doubtless half-right. I have been ill so much, and I am so absurdly fond of Lilian that I dare say I should spoil her utterly if she were left to my care. I am very much afraid that if she wanted the traditional mirror and hammer, which

they always refer to with over-indulged children, I should want to get it for her, rather than see tears in her beautiful eyes. I am really not to be trusted, you see."

Nothing more tenderly pathetic can be imagined than the half-humorous way in which the sweet-voiced woman spoke these words, all the while with a suspicious tremor of the almost childlike mouth which told volumes to the sympathetic listener. How truly noble she was to try to make light of her husband's selfishness and to shield him from censure. He "good," indeed! Rebecca repeated the word in indignation, and believed that she did well not to actually hate him.

There had been another time when she was overwhelmed with embarrassment. Mrs. McKenzie had sent for her just as she and Lilian were dressed for the afternoon drive, which was one of the commands for the day. The mother had a new and expensive wrap which was to enfold Lilian, and which bore all about it the mark of the lady's exquisite taste. As she bent to kiss the child, for good-by, she said to Rebecca:

"By the way, dear, are you going anywhere in particular?"

"No, ma'am," said Rebecca heedlessly. "We are going wherever Thomas chooses to take us; just for a drive."

"Then suppose you suggest to him to drive

down Park Avenue, and you be kind enough to leave a note for me at No. 976?"

Then the girl's cheeks, not only, but her very forehead flushed, and she stood shamedfaced and silent. Mrs. McKenzie regarded her for a moment with apparent curiosity, then laughed lightly.

"Never mind, dear child," she said, and her tone was that of one who wished to soothe. "I see how it is; you are under orders. Do not be distressed; it is only one of the idiosyncrasies of a good man. Remember always that he is that, however strange his ways may seem to you. I understand him as few do. He is morbid over our little girl here. We have buried three, and his whole soul is centered upon her; he is so afraid of her being left for a single moment without oversight that he is even nervous about an errand being done when she is present, for fear, in some unaccountable way, she will be exposed to danger. I ought not to have suggested the errand. Thomas can do it as well at another time, but I thought perhaps it had not been considered necessary to put you in leading-strings, since you are so much older than our former nurses."

Rebecca had gone away in a whirl of bewilderment and pain, strongly intermingled with indignation. If Mr. McKenzie did not trust her any more than that, he would better discharge her and assume the care of the child himself. What a

shame it was that she must rudely decline to do a simple errand for the lady of the house — Lilian's mother! The bewilderment was — why did the wife and mother permit herself to be treated in this way — almost like a naughty child who could not be allowed a mind of her own?

The theory that she was not in her right mind had been put aside after the first day or two as quite untenable. Was she not at all times a sweet, self-controlled woman, with entirely sensible ideas as regarded Lilian, and entirely patient and charitable words for her husband? Moreover, it was plain to be seen what the family friends thought of her. There were a few ladies who had the *entrée* of the nursery, and who kissed and caressed Lilian while they talked condescendingly to her nurse. "Isn't Mrs. McKenzie a lovely woman? Do you not find her charming? So patient, poor dear, though she is a great sufferer at times; and so patient with some other things in her life which call for unusual forbearance! Oh! we think she is just wonderful." These last sentences were apt to be accentuated by impressive shakes of the head and impressive intonations. Mr McKenzie's name was never mentioned, but Rebecca grew to understanding, she hardly knew how, that the "forbearance" mentioned referred to him.

All things considered, her new life, though it had its embarrassments and drawbacks, was fascinating. The very element of mystery which she

could not help feeling surrounded it, added to the interest. As a physician's daughter, she had heard family histories, before now, which had to do with the mysterious — sometimes with the tragic. It was what had made her mind spring so promptly to insanity as an explanation; and because this did not fit, she was often at work over the problem: Why was Mr. McKenzie so peculiar in the treatment of his wife? The interest which surrounded this question helped her to forget, or at least to ignore, some of the annoyances of her position.

It was certainly a new experience for Dr. Meredith's daughter to remember always to say "Yes'm," and "No, ma'am," and very little more unless directly questioned; to respond to bells and calls at all hours of the day, whether it was for her convenience or otherwise; yet she was not a little interested to see how readily she could accommodate herself to the new order of things, albeit she realized how different it would have been if she had come in contact with any who knew that she was Miss Meredith, the only daughter of the leading physician in a flourishing town not two hundred miles distant.

Occasionally she wondered how she should act "supposing" Mrs. Bryce, or Miss Evans and her sister Miss Edna, who were her father's patrons and her friends, should "happen" to be friends of Mrs. McKenzie, and should be brought in to see Lilian. Sometimes she wondered if the chamber-

maid, who was pretty, and who could, on occasion, look and dress like a society girl, had her social position also, and felt herself dropped below it, and was masquerading in a sort of disguise, as she could not help feeling that she was herself, despite the fact that she had given her own full name and answered truthfully all questions which had been put to her. The ease with which she maintained her present relations grew in part out of the fact that nobody was enough interested in her to ask many questions.

As a rule, however, she put herself into the background, and gave her mind to the study of the lives spread out before her.

So far as Lilian was concerned this was an excellent thing to do. Never did child have more faithful nurse; never was child loved more tenderly, or watched over more conscientiously. Mr. McKenzie, looking on with a much keener and more intelligent eye than Rebecca gave him credit for, daily blessed his good fortune in securing such a treasure. As to whether her constant study of the other members of the family would be productive of good was a thing that remained to be decided.

This New Year's evening, on which she sat in luxury in Mrs. McKenzie's room, marked a progression in her career. She had been invited by the lady of the house to spend the evening with her. "When I am well enough to realize it, I am

often lonely," she said. "Mr. McKenzie has so many duties to society that he is compelled to be absent a great deal. It is a trial to a man, you know, dear, to have an invalid wife ; but he has to make the best of it. It is years since I have been able to go out with him much. He is more accustomed to it now, I think, than I am, though at first it was a thing which he thought he could not endure ; but men grow used to such discipline sooner than women, I think ; do not you ?"

There was a pathetic little smile on her face as she spoke, which provoked Rebecca to indignant pity. This matter of invalidism was one of the things which she did not understand. There was no mistaking the fact that Mrs. McKenzie had days and nights of suffering — when her room was closed to all but the physician, and the patient nurse who stood guard over her. Mr. McKenzie at these times made brief visits at rare intervals, and the others staid away altogether. After such experiences, which came often enough, Rebecca thought, to have alarmed a less self-centered man than Mr. McKenzie, the sufferer would emerge with deep rings under her eyes and a general state of exhaustion, which told volumes ; but she would resume her place at the head of the elegant table, where her husband and she dined in state, and receive her friends as usual, without other reference to her severe attack than to speak of it occasionally, as something which was a matter

of course. Why vigorous measures were not resorted to to save her from such periods of pain, Rebecca could not imagine. Why did they not have a council of physicians, eminent as specialists, if the disease were obscure? Why did not her husband take her abroad in search of skill, if he had exhausted the resources of this country? Turn which way she would, she felt bewildered and incensed. The utmost that the husband seemed to consider necessary was to guard the movements of his wife almost as if she had been an imbecile. Even when she went to pay the few visits which her invalidism allowed itself, she was always in the close carriage, and that inevitable nurse was forever on guard. True, she sat in the carriage and waited for her mistress, and was deference itself; but she had alighted and accompanied her to the very door, and was at the door again to receive her.

"Mr. McKenzie has a horror of my being seized with one of my attacks, I suppose," the lady had explained to Rebecca's questioning eyes. "He does not like to have me out of nurse's sight. It is hard on her, poor thing. I am quite sorry for her at times." And Rebecca felt sure that the invalid was sorry for herself, and chafed under such constant care. "If he would bestow a little of it in person," she muttered to herself, "instead of delegating it all to the nurse, one could have more faith in him."

This thought came to her in full force on the evening in question. She had never been in Mrs. McKenzie's room before when the master of the house was present, and she stopped irresolutely in the doorway when she caught sight of him, although she was coming in response to a summons.

Mrs. McKenzie turned her head in the direction of the door and smiled a welcome. "Come in, my dear; Mr. McKenzie is just starting. I think a gentleman who has been paying ceremonious calls all day ought to be released on New Year's evening, and allowed to spend the time with his family. Do not you?"

Before Rebecca could imagine what reply to make, Mr. McKenzie had turned to his wife, his face grave, his voice cold. "It is not a ceremonious call which I am to make this evening, you will remember, Mrs. McKenzie."

"O, no! a wedding reception, and in honor of an old friend of mine. She used to be in our employ, Rebecca, and Mr. McKenzie feels the need of showing her all kindness on that account. O, Deane! do not imagine I am finding fault with you; only it is a little lonely on New Year's Day, you know."

"Rebecca will bear you company," he said, "and Mrs. Payne is, of course, within call. Good-evening." His bow seemed to be as much for Rebecca as for his wife. Whatever sensations the wife may have had, the girl saw him depart with

feelings near akin to scorn. A wedding reception indeed! What right had a man who left an invalid wife at home, to mingle in receptions, or social gatherings of any sort, when she pleaded loneliness, and all but entreated him to stay with her? — for the sweet face and the pathetic voice were entreaties. And he could remind her that her child's nurse and Mrs. Payne, her ever-present guard, were at hand to take his place!

CHAPTER VI.

LOOKING BACKWARD.

IT was very quiet in the pretty room for the first few minutes after Mr. McKenzie's departure. Rebecca, who supposed she had been summoned to read aloud, waited, book in hand, for directions. It had recently been discovered that this was one of her accomplishments, and Mrs. McKenzie had seized upon it eagerly. She grew "so tired of reading to herself; she liked somebody to share the thought with. Mrs. Payne read words very well," she said, with a marked emphasis on "words"; "but as for ideas!" — and then she shrugged her shoulders expressively.

It was fiction of a kind which was comparatively new to the reader, that her listener's tastes demanded. Not an especially objectionable kind, perhaps, but of a sort which to Rebecca seemed too improbable to be reasonable or interesting. She waited in vain, on this particular evening, to be directed to commence. Mrs. McKenzie's nurse

had betaken herself to her own room, adjoining this, and dropped the heavy curtains which separated them. They were, therefore, to all intents and purposes alone ; especially as the good, tired woman, seeming to feel herself free for the time, promptly dropped asleep, as her gentle snoring indicated. But Mrs. McKenzie sat with her eyes bent on the glowing coals in the grate, and evidently thinking.

"Men are strange beings," she volunteered at length. "All men are, I presume. If people could know beforehand what sort of a life is mapped out for them, what a difference it would make in biography. Don't you think so? Does it never seem to you that it might have been a wise way to have shown us visions, shadow-pictures perhaps, of the years, and to have said to us, 'That is you at thirty-five ;' or 'Those are your surroundings as they will be at forty, provided you do thus and so?'"

"And if one did not do 'thus and so?'" answered Rebecca, amused and a trifle startled by the suggestion, "what then?"

"Why, then, more shadow-pictures, with possibilities, and a chance to choose. Wouldn't it make a difference with lives?"

"I do not know," said Rebecca, with great gravity. "I think I should be afraid to make the choice. I would rather have infinite Wisdom choose for me."

"Ah! but we do choose, in the dark. We elect in our youth and folly what we shall be, in a sense; not knowing what we shall become, because of our choice. Don't you see what I mean?"

"Don't you think we are guided in our choice, held from making mistakes, if we will be, and led in the best paths, on the whole?"

Mrs. McKenzie shook her head, and drew a long, weary sigh. "I can never feel it. Do you?"

Rebecca opened her mouth to answer, then closed it suddenly, the ready color flushing her cheeks. Such was her theory, her profession; but did she really feel it? Was it her belief, for instance, that mother and Ailee being in Heaven was the best thing to-night, not only for them, but for her? Nay. Was her father's second marriage, on the whole, for her best good?

Mrs. McKenzie had turned from the firelight, and was regarding her closely. She smiled significantly as Rebecca's eyes met hers. "You need not answer, dear," she said. "I know the difference between theory and feeling." Then, suddenly, she turned the girl's thoughts into a new channel. "I am hungry sometimes for Carroll."

"For Carroll!" Rebecca repeated, startled. Who could this be for whom the wife frankly avowed hunger?

"Yes; haven't you heard of him? My boy

Carroll. I have not seen him now in nearly a year. I thought his father would surely have him home for the holidays, but he was inexorable."

"Mrs. McKenzie, of course you do not mean your own son?"

"Indeed I do; my own, beautiful boy, Carroll. He is in his eighteenth year, and as beautiful as a dream. I do not believe a more lovely face and form were ever given to mortal. Lilian looks like him, except that he is large and robust. If you will reach that letter-case at your left, I will show you his photograph. He sent it to me only last week, and I think it the best one yet; I have one representing each year of his life."

Rebecca gazed with keen interest at the handsome, boyish face held out to her. It was a rare face; the striking features of both father and mother were plainly marked and combined; they made a somewhat remarkable whole.

"Do you wonder that my heart aches often with the longing to see him, and feel his kisses and caresses? He is very fond of his mother."

"Is he so far away that he cannot come home for the holidays?"

Mrs. McKenzie shook her head, and her soft eyes filled with tears. "O, no! he is only a few hours' ride away. His father rushes there in a night and takes breakfast with him whenever the desire to see him overmasters him; but I cannot do that. I wish I could. I have often wondered

what would happen if I should run away. What would poor Mrs. Payne do then, do you suppose?"

There was the most curious mixture of child and woman about this fair, frail creature. Often a sentence begun in pathos would end like the naughty fancy of a willful child. But Rebecca was not thinking of her. Here was a new factor in the problem she was trying to solve. A beautiful young son for whom his invalid mother's heart hungered, so near that the father could go to him of a night, and he not at home even for the holidays. She did not know how many questions she was expected to ask, so remained silent, except for her eyes.

Mrs. McKenzie answered their look. "You wonder why he is not beside me this New Year's Day. My dear, that is another of his father's peculiarities. I was injudicious with the dear boy. I gave my consent to a hundred fancies which his father did not approve. I can really feel that it is for Carroll's best good he was sent away to school; but to keep him away even at this holiday season is hard."

"I should think so!" burst forth Rebecca. She was ashamed of herself on the instant. What right had she to be criticising to a wife the actions of her husband? Yet she could not hold back her words. "I beg your pardon, Mrs. McKenzie, but has not a mother some rights as well as a father?"

"Now, my child, don't be naughty. I will not

have you imagining that Mr. McKenzie is other than kind and wise. He is doing it for our best good, don't you see?—Carroll's and mine. He says I indulge the boy unwisely, which is true; and he says the boy indulges me, which is also true. Neither of us can seem to help it. Oh! he will come home before long—in the summer, I believe—but there are times when it seems long to wait. He writes to me every week—beautiful letters—and he is a grand, noble boy. I did not spoil him by my indulgence; I only tried to, and I might have succeeded in time.

"He has been much away from us. School-life began with him earlier than it does with most. His father was held at home until after he was twenty; perhaps that is why he thinks Carroll should begin to be a man so early. Hasn't he a lovely name? You think perhaps he was named for the street we live on; but the entire square was named for Carroll's great-grandfather, Judge Carroll, who was a power in this city even before it was a city. We were brought up to think that it was a great thing to be born into this world as Carrolls. What a curious thing pride of family is, is it not? My poor mother had a great deal of it; I do not think I ever quite satisfied my family but once in my life, and that was when I became a McKenzie. By the way, dear, I wonder that you have never married."

"The McKenzie darted from subject to subject

in a way which fairly bewildered her listener. She was audacious, too; surely she had no right to "wonder" in that questioning way about the private history of one who were almost a stranger to her, even though she was in her employ. But there was nothing disagreeable in her manner, after all, and Rebecca was persuaded that only kindly interest was meant.

The question, or hint of a question, did not quicken her pulses in the least. She only smiled gravely, and said in the most indifferent tone, "Do you?" Yet her thoughts had been turned backward, and while Mrs. McKenzie responded promptly that she did, and went on to say that despite all the mistakes, and misunderstandings, and disappointments that there undoubtedly were in the married life, on the whole, she believed it to be the true sphere of woman — her supposed listener did not listen at all, but took a journey into her own past.

Mrs. McKenzie's question, or rather wonderment, had never before been spoken in her presence, but she realized that it had probably often been felt. Suppose there were somebody who had a right to question, and to whom she would feel in honor bound to tell the whole truth, what would she tell? The query brought the friend of her girlhood vividly before her. When she was eighteen — and she thought, with a start of surprise, of how many years ago that was — Fred Pierson

had been her almost constant companion. They had been friends much further back than that; why, she was only fifteen when the Pierson family moved to the adjoining town, and Fred entered high school and speedily became, first her rival, and then so intimate a friend that she quite liked to have him show himself the better scholar, in some things; it was such a delight to look up to and be proud of him. Moreover, he was very generous in his treatment of her; never did he conquer a problem in algebra over which she had struggled in vain, but he said, "Wait until it comes to grammar, Rebecca, and I sit with my chin in my hand looking anxiously for a prompting word from you;" or "Just think how I shall get tripped up in history to-morrow, to pay for this!"

It was true she was his superior in both these studies; perhaps that made his superiority in other things more pleasant; but he was never vain of his scholarship, at least before her. Why, he was everything that was good and noble in those days; she had been sure of it. In later years, when both had left school, and Fred was studying law in Judge Bartlett's office in their own town, the intimacy continued. It grew to be a matter of course to see the two in company upon all possible occasions.

"Are you and Fred going to the sociable?" her mother would ask. Or her father would say,

"I am sorry we cannot attend the reception at the Websters', but I suppose Rebecca and Fred will be there to represent us."

This habit of taking things as a matter of course had also been adopted by the young people themselves. Looking back critically, as she had done long ago, Rebecca could find no hour in which Fred Pierson had said to her, "Will you be my wife?" But oh! the numberless times in which he had said words like these: "You and I will have a different state of things from this when we get to living; won't we?" This, in criticism of a young married couple who were their intimate acquaintances. Or, "O, Rebecca! the weeks sometimes seem very slow in passing, when one is getting ready for life. I long for the time when I shall be established in business, and we can afford to indulge some of our tastes together." Or, after a brief absence, "Rebecca, I don't believe you missed me as I did you. I am always looking forward to the time when I shall not have to miss you any more."

She could have filled pages with such expressions as these. What more did a young, innocent girl need? She never felt a need—not even when she was asked direct questions.

"Are you and Mr. Pierson engaged?" Carrie Stuart had asked her in plain English. Carrie was a summer acquaintance who was spending a few weeks at Judge Bartlett's, where Mr. Pierson

boarded. She had grown suddenly intimate with Rebecca, after the fashion of some girls.

Rebecca remembered vividly that she blushed, and laughed, and answered slowly, "Why — yes, I suppose we are."

"And when are you to be married?" The girl belonged to the class who can ask such questions, even of their passing friends. Her response had been prompt :

"Oh! not for years and years yet. We have never even thought of setting a day. Fred is still a student, you know."

"Yes; but he expects to be admitted in the spring. I should think you would be planning for the wedding."

"There is time enough for that," Rebecca had answered serenely. And so it had proved.

The young man had been admitted the following spring, and was promptly offered a flattering position in Mr. Stuart's law office, in a neighboring city.

"It is a very unusual opening for a fellow as young as I," Fred had said to Rebecca, "and I know who I have to thank for it. Judge Bartlett says that Mr. Stuart's daughter has great influence with him, even in business matters, and it does not take a prophet to tell who influenced her in my favor."

His tone was significant; and Rebecca, although she disclaimed any attempt at influence, liked to

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think that her friend, Carrie Stuart, had helped to open this flattering business prospect, because she was fond of her. She told herself that she should always remember this of Carrie.

"It will seem strange to be living in another town," Fred had said, the evening before he departed to his honors. "Do you suppose you will know how to write to me? I shall be very exacting in my demands—nothing less than a letter each week will anything like satisfy me. In fact, I don't expect to be satisfied; even your letters will be poor substitutes for you; but I suppose I couldn't in conscience expect such a busy little woman as you to write oftener," he added playfully.

Rebecca had gaily assured her friend that she would "try to think of something to say as often as once a week," and had been true to her word. Letters had passed between the two with the regularity of sunrise. The young man wrote excellent letters.

"My dear Rebecca," they began, or perhaps "My best friend," but they were not fulsome in tone, nor lavish in adjectives. He gave very interesting descriptions of the city; of the trips which he occasionally took in the interests of the firm; of the various objects of interest which he saw; of the lectures he was privileged to attend; of the legal cases which specially excited or amused him. Each letter was sure to have

some reference to Christmas. "Remember, Rebecca, I shall be at home for the holidays. I shall tolerate no engagements then which do not include me. You can guess, possibly, some things which I shall have to say to you about Christmas time. I have been a very patient fellow not to say them before."

These, and kindred sentences, Rebecca smiled over, and rejoiced to think how thoroughly they understood each other.

Suddenly the young man's letters ceased. Two, three weeks passed, and not a word came from him. Rebecca was greatly alarmed, but her mother tried to comfort her.

"He may have had to go away on business, dear, to some little town where the mails are irregular; where there is even not a mail every day — there are such places. Or he may be coming a few days earlier, and is waiting to surprise you; men are thoughtless about such things. A few days of tardiness about a letter never means as much to them as it does to us. I wouldn't worry, dear, nothing very serious can have happened, or he would have telegraphed."

He did not telegraph, but two days before Christmas came the longed-for letter. Not the usual style of envelope; it had a curious, almost an official look, but the superscription was Fred's own.

Rebecca tore the thing open in nervous haste,

and thereby spoiled one of the cards — a reception card :

"MR. AND MRS. ALVIN K. STUART

request the pleasure of your presence

at the marriage of their daughter

CAROLINE

to

MR. FREDERICK JAY PIERSON,

on Thursday, January the first."

CHAPTER VII.

WASTING SYMPATHY.

REBECCA MEREDITH, sitting in her easy-chair in Mrs. McKenzie's luxurious room, apparently listening to that lady's voice, and really going over her past, remembered just how she sat and stared at that sheet of paper, and just how strange those four lines looked :

"At the marriage of their daughter

CAROLINE

to

MR. FREDERICK JAY PIERSON."

Remembered that she thought, how strange a coincidence it was that Carrie — her friend Carrie Stuart — was to marry a man with exactly the same name as Fred.

A grave smile was on her face this night, as she saw how vivid every minute detail connected with that evening still was. She knew that the clock had just struck seven, and her father had

remarked that Jim was very slow about getting up the horses; and that her mother had said here was a letter from their old acquaintance, Mrs. Barnes, and that she was going to Florida for the remainder of the winter; and then she had reminded the doctor that the coal was nearly out, and perhaps he ought to write a card ordering some more before he went out for the evening.

Rebecca had never been able to think of that evening since, through all these years, without remembering about Jim being late with the horses, and Mrs. Barnes going to Florida, and their being nearly out of coal. Yet it seemed to her that it must have been hours before she took in the astounding fact that she held Fred's — her Fred's — wedding cards in her hand. She had occasionally imagined, as girls will, how they would read:

DR. AND MRS. JOHN ELLIS MEREDITH

*request the pleasure of your presence
at the marriage of their daughter*

REBECCA

to

MR. FREDERICK JAY PIERSON.

That was the way the card should read, of course. Everybody who knew those two expected it — except, perhaps, her friend Carrie Stuart. The woman of twenty-seven could smile

over the vagaries of the girl of twenty, but the memory of them was very distinct.

Since that evening so long ago, she had heard absolutely nothing from Frederick Pierson. She had heard of him, that the marriage took place in due season, and that the young people went abroad, the son-in-law on business for the great firm of Stuart, Stuart & Pierson. That in due time they returned, and were set up at house-keeping in a grand establishment, as became the house of Stuart; but so far as her former acquaintance was concerned, it was as though Fred Pierson had died and been buried. His last letter to her, written in December, had begun, "My dear Rebecca," and had closed with a reminder that the holidays were close at hand; and had been signed, "As ever, Fred."

Her next communication from him, in December of the same year, had been those wedding cards! Whether he had, all through the months, been living a double life — writing his weekly letters to her, and paying his hourly court to the daughter of the senior member of the firm; or whether it had been a sudden, reckless decision, carried out with headlong speed, for some object which she did not understand, Rebecca had never known.

Of course there was much talk, and questions to answer, which were more or less trying. But Rebecca, as a girl, had few intimates; it was hard

for self-respecting people to question her. Even to her father she said, "Why, father, Fred and I were never engaged, you know. We were school-mates, and friends of long standing." But she had winced under the sentence, and thought of the reply she made when Carrie Stuart asked, "Are you and Mr. Pierson engaged?" Which time had she spoken absolute truth? It was only her mother who knew all that there was to tell.

Following hard upon this experience had come another, calculated, if anything could, to sink it into the background. The little sister Ailee had been given to them, and she wound the sweetest of clinging tendrils about the bruised heart; then the mother had gone away on that solemn journey which is taken but once, and Rebecca had been left to be mother to the child, and companion and comforter to the father. Then Mrs. Meredith had come into their home; then Ailee followed her mother. In these strange ways the years had come and gone, until now Rebecca, sitting by Mrs. McKenzie's fireside reviewing her past, found that while there were many hard lines in her life, and while there might still be bitterness in her thought of Fred Pierson, his name had lost the power to make her heart beat one throb the faster.

She could even almost smile over it all, and wonder why she had ever cared so much. "S all, I did not really care for him, but for the person I

thought he was," she told herself, "and when one ceases to respect a man, why, then of course" —

Then Mrs. McKenzie's soft voice, which had been moving on steadily, broke in upon her musings. "And so, my dear, I am very glad that you are not of that stamp, because it would really be a trial to lose you, though you have been with us so short a time."

Rebecca heard, with a start of dismay. What had the lady been talking about? "Of what stamp, madam?" she asked, her face flushing as she realized what the question revealed. Mrs. McKenzie regarded her with an interested smile. "My dear," she said, "I believe you have not heard a word of what I have been saying, and here I have been telling you about the perfections of one of your predecessors — an interesting story, I assure you. Where have you been?"

"I was looking backward," Rebecca answered, smiling. "I beg your pardon; something you said a moment ago sent me into the past. Would you mind repeating your last sentence or two?"

"Oh! perhaps they are hardly worth it. Something in your manner, or perhaps it was your dress, reminded me of Helen Harvey. She was Lilian's nurse for four months. Lilian and I were fond of her; but she grew too sympathetic, and Mr. McKenzie had to dismiss her. I was rejoicing over the fact that you did not seem to be like her in that respect."

"Isn't that rather a doubtful compliment?" Rebecca asked, in a somewhat constrained tone. "Surely people ought to try to be sympathetic."

"So I think. I told Mr. McKenzie he was unnecessarily sensitive. She lavished it all upon him, you understand. It is hard for him always to have an invalid wife, and to be obliged to go out to social gatherings alone, as well as to entertain his friends as best he can, often without help. I do not wonder that she was sorry for him, and told him so, and tried to make up to him for his affliction in every way that she could. I think Mr. McKenzie would have been sensible if people had let him alone; but servants will talk, you know, and poor Helen, with the best intentions, made it unpleasant after awhile both for herself and him, so she had to go."

Rebecca's cheeks were ablaze. "I do not think I shall err in that direction," she said coldly. "May I read now?"

But the lady was not in the mood for reading. She waved the book from her gracefully. "Not yet, please. I feel like talking. It is not often I am in the mood; or, if I am, there is no one to talk to. Poor Mrs. Payne is too stupid to tempt me. I will tell you about my Carroll. Mothers have to talk about their sons once in awhile, you know, or their hearts would get too full."

She talked so well, with such a sweet undertone of yearning in it all, that Rebecca who had

been jarred, she could not have told why, by those words about Helen Harvey, forget them and felt all her heart throb with earnest sympathy for this poor, lonely, ill-treated mother.

"She is ill-treated!" she told herself boldly. "The idea of supposing that her starved heart will be fed, if she is surrounded by luxuries, and provided with a nurse, while her boy, for whom she pines, is kept away from her; and her husband seeks his society elsewhere. Talk about wasting sympathy on him; the idea!" and her lip curled ominously. "I am sure I shall be very unlike Helen Harvey, if she was tempted in that direction. But there is certainly sore need for sympathy. Well, Rebecca Meredith, you have found your mission at last. A place where you are wanted, and needed — which are not always the same things, I suppose; but if ever a poor woman needed a judicious friend, it is this frail wife and mother kept in a gilded cage; so surrounded by luxury and selfishness that she is dying by inches. She looks weaker and frailer than she did when I came. If I knew the boy, Carroll, I would write to him to assert his manhood and insist upon coming home to his mother. What a dreadful thing it would be if she should slip away from life and not see him again! I wonder if I cannot, in a perfectly decorous and business-like way, outwit that man, incarnation of self that he is!"

This was Rebecca's soliloquy after the invalid,

having talked herself tired, and gotten into a passion of weeping for her absent son, all but fainted away in her weakness. Rebecca summoned the nurse, and, after waiting until she was assured there was nothing for her to do, went to her own room to be indignant.

"At last I can surely feel that I am wanted," she repeated. "The poor, hungry heart turns toward me; I can see it in every word she says, and in the tenderness with which she looks at me. I mean to love her, and do for her in every way that I can. But I must be careful not to arouse the suspicions of His Majesty, or he will imagine that I must in some way be neglecting Lilian, because I occasionally think of somebody else. I wonder if people, men and women whom he meets in his world, have the least idea what sort of man he is?"

By degrees, the feeling that she had been called to do a special work in this strangely organized home, even to become the special champion of its mistress, colored all this young woman's life. She grew so darkly suspicious of Mr. McKenzie that there were days when she would hardly have been surprised to have detected him in the act of poisoning his wife. She was even suspicious of Mrs. Payne, who, the housekeeper declared, was a model of patience and excellence.

Occasionally there were circumstances which seemed to justify her in this suspicion. For in-

stance, she was one evening left for a few minutes alone with Mrs. McKenzie just after dinner. Mrs. Payne went downstairs begging her to remain until she returned.

"Is she really gone?" Mrs. McKenzie asked, with a laugh of mingled amusement and annoyance. "Then close the door, do, my dear, and push up a window, and let us breathe fresh air. I do get so tired of the poor, stupid soul! It is really very tiresome always to have her about me, watching every movement. Sometimes, when my nerves are especially unstrung, I can almost fancy her a great, green-eyed cat, and myself a poor little mouse on whom she is ready to pounce at the slightest provocation."

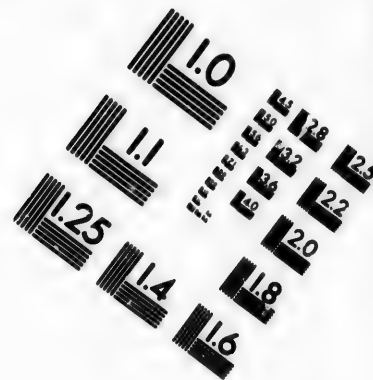
Rebecca listened, distressed at this revelation of overstrained nerves, and asked, "My dear madam, why do you not discharge her and secure somebody who is more congenial to you?"

"Discharge Mrs. Payne!" repeated Mrs. McKenzie, with a pretty little affectation of dismay. "Don't, I beg of you, ever let Mr. McKenzie know that you were guilty of such a dangerous idea. Why, he would almost rather discharge me, and keep Mrs. Payne, if it came to a question of which." Then, arrested apparently by the look on Rebecca's face, she laughed lightly, and added, "I am talking nonsense, of course; but I assure you you do not know what you are saying. Why, poor Mrs. Payne has been in the house for

seventeen years; she came here when my Carroll was a wee baby. Think how stupid it must be for her to live on and on in the old way year after year! I assure you I am often sorry for her, and oftener sorry for myself; we are both so dull and stupid. Oh! she is good; but it is a real relief to get rid of her occasionally. Where has she gone? For her cup of tea? I hope she will have to wait for it. Do, my dear, wait on me a little just for the pleasure of seeing somebody else about me. Give me that glass of water, please, and let me prepare my own drops; it is time for them. This is one of the luxuries which Mrs. Payne will never allow me; she thinks my hand is not steady enough, I suppose; but it is. See how nicely I can drop this. Mr. McKenzie used to do it for me when I was first taken ill; but that was before he grew so busy, and so used to my invalidism. My dear, whatever you do, don't marry a man of affairs; who will be courted and fawned upon by the public; besought to meet this committee, and speak before that one, and let the other one give him a dinner, or a reception, or something of the sort. If you do, mark my words, he will have no time for you."

And the nurse had come in at that very moment, while Rebecca held the dainty cut glass, and the drops were being carefully measured into it, and had swooped down upon them with a look at Rebecca which astonished and offended her,





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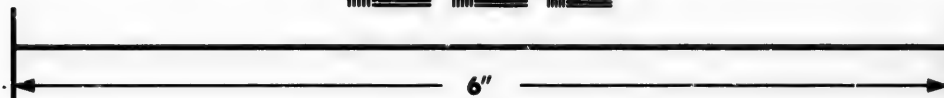
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and had said with nervous haste, "O, Mrs. McKenzie! you must not; I will attend to that. It was not time for any medicine!"—this last with another look at Rebecca, and reproach in her voice. Then she had unceremoniously snatched the glass from the girl's fingers, and emptied its contents into the glowing grate.

Rebecca immediately left the room, and sought her own in a burning rage. What right had that insufferable nurse to snatch the glass from her hands? What was she doing but just as she had been directed? "They cannot be very dangerous drops," she continued; "if they were an invalid would not be carrying them around in her pocket. It is just an attack of jealousy on the part of that nurse. She cannot endure the idea of there being any other person capable of waiting on Mrs. McKenzie; it detracts somewhat from her self-importance. Or else—I wonder if it can be possible that she has allowed the poor lady to have some medicine of which the doctor does not approve, and is afraid she will be discovered. Something to make her drowsy, perhaps, when she is tired of her, and wants to get a nap. Really, it looks as though something of the kind might be the case. She certainly seemed alarmed when she saw her taking it. If that self-absorbed man should discover, some day, that his wife had been poisoned, by mistake, I wonder if he would care? O, dear! I am growing wicked, too. This is a

dangerous house. But I will not desert her; no, not even though they gossip about me, and couple my name with my master's, as they did that poor Helen Harvey's."

Her lip curled in derisive scorn over this thought, but in a moment she was grave again, and anxious. The suspicion once roused that the poor, neglected wife might be unkindly dealt with by the nurse on whom the husband placed such perfect trust, gained strength as she thought about it. She resolved to be as alert and watchful as possible, and to give Mrs. McKenzie as much of her time as she could.

CHAPTER VIII.

POOR REBECCA.

“**R**EBECCA,” said Mr. McKenzie, stopping that young woman on the stairs one Sunday morning, “it has not occurred to me heretofore that you might wish to attend church. I suppose I have been remiss.” Something very like a sigh escaped him, but Rebecca made no response to it, or to him. She thought he had been very remiss, and she had no sympathy with his sighs. Such being the case, there was nothing for her but silence.

“I own a pew in Dr. Carter’s church, on the next square,” continued the gentleman, in his most business-like tone. “I suppose you could frequently go in the evening, if you chose, and you are welcome to a seat in my pew. I am rarely there in the evening. I should have mentioned it before. But the thing which suggests it to me now is the fact that I have a fancy for testing my Lillian’s powers of self-control by taking her to

church with me this morning. My good mother used to think, I remember, that a child's education in this direction should commence very early, and I certainly want my child to fail of no help in life which I can plan for her. But I should wish to have you in attendance, for it may be that the little one will be timid in a strange place, surrounded by so many people. Can you arrange to get her ready for morning service, and accompany her?"

"Of course, if you so direct," Rebecca answered, with such utter coldness that if he had meant to be kind to her he might have been discouraged. "But, Mr. McKenzie, Miss Lilian is very happy with her mother on Sabbath mornings, and I think she will miss the little one."

Did she fancy it, or did his face grow colder, and his tone haughtier?

"Lilian can spend a portion of the afternoon with her mother, which will be enough for both of them. I desire to have her with me in church this morning. And moreover, Rebecca, I think I have arranged matters so that hereafter I can lunch at home on Tuesdays, in which case I wish the child at table with me; and yourself, of course, to attend her. I have been for some time sorry that my hour for dining on Sundays made it inconvenient for the child to be with me. I want her to learn early to conduct herself properly at table. You may plan, if you please, to serve her

lunch with mine on Tuesdays hereafter. If I am detained later than one o'clock you and she may lunch without waiting for me; but I shall try to be present. That is all."

He stepped aside courteously enough, to let her pass, but Rebecca went upstairs disliking him more than ever, and with a feeling of utter rebellion at her lot.

"To be dismissed like a common Irish servant!" she exclaimed in a fume, and then laughed at her own folly. She was not Irish, it is true, but had she not deliberately chosen the place of a servant? Why should she complain at being treated like one?

"I don't," she said indignantly, answering her own thought. "I do not want him to treat me in any other way; but — well, I detest him, and that is all there is about it. So I must needs attend the great man even to the church, and once a week at table. I wonder if I am to stand behind Lilian's chair while she plays with her luncheon? He did not condescend to say whether I might eat a bite at the same time, or not. A 'portion of the afternoon' will be enough for the mother to have her child. Will it, indeed? I wonder who is the better judge of that, you or the mother? Oh! that man."

All things considered, Rebecca Meredith certainly needed the help of the church service or of something else. Perhaps it is time for a little

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explanation as to what the church was to her. When she was a schoolgirl of fifteen, there was a time of special interest in the church to which her parents belonged, and Rebecca, in common with nearly a score of others of about her own age, was received into it a member.

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Looking back upon the experience, Rebecca remembered that she had considered it the right and proper thing to do. "Of course I am a Christian," she had assured herself. "Father and mother are, and they brought me up to be. I read in the Bible every day, and I say my prayers, nearly always. As for trying to please Jesus, every decent person does that. I am sure I did right in answering yes to that question. Father is an officer in the church; it would seem strange not to have his daughter join, when so many others are doing so. Besides, why should I not? There is nothing to be done because of it that I am afraid of. And I certainly would not like to have Fred Pierson a member of the church, and me outside." So she had joined.

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Up to the time of her leaving home, she had lived what it is fair to call an exemplary Christian life. Religion was lived in her father's house, but not much spoken about. Her father, you will remember, was a very busy man. His life was, so far as he knew how to order it, Christlike. He certainly went about doing all the good he could. No sick person, however poor, sent for him in

vain. Indeed, he went to many who were afraid to send for him, and cared for them as skillfully as though he had believed they could ever pay him in money. No family in need of food or clothing, was ever brought to his notice, that he did not freely and cheerfully do his share to relieve. All these things were a matter of course. He rarely had time at home, even for family worship. This service had been frequently attempted, but so constantly was "father" called for in the midst of it, that at last the attempt was abandoned; and the blessing asked at table when the busy physician could spend time to eat his meals regularly, was the only way in which religion showed itself in words. Oh! sentences like these were often on his lips: "We will do thus and so because it is right," or "That would be wrong, my boy, so we will not even think of it."

But these things were, Rebecca believed, a matter of course to any upright man. As for her mother, she was a sweet, timid woman; strong to do for others, and steadily doing; strong to suffer for others if there had been need, but brought up to hide her tender thoughts of Jesus Christ and her loyal love for him, deep in her heart as a thing too sacred to be spoken of. When Rebecca united with the church she had kissed her with very peculiar tenderness, and said, "Dear daughter, no act of yours could have given me greater joy; I knew you would come." But after that,

intimate as they were, associated as they were in many kindly offices for the sick and the poor, one as they were in thought on all important subjects, they had not been in the habit of speaking plainly to each other of their love for Christ, and their joy in his service.

The boys had been different — more outspoken. "Rebie," her brother in India, had said to her once, "does your religion make you happy all the time? Make you want to do, and be, and go, for Christ's sake?" She had looked at him wonderingly, and queried within herself whether all boys were so impulsive and outspoken. No, they were not; for Fred Pierson never said anything of that kind to her. Afterwards she decided, or rather, without thinking about it carefully enough to dignify the process with the use of the word "decision," she had glided into the belief that it was because Hervey was going to be a missionary that he was different from others — from her, for instance. Then, when the younger brother developed, less of the impulsive, perhaps, but even more of the strong, outspoken power of Christianity, it was all so fully explained by the fact that he went to Heaven so soon. Of course those who were being gotten ready for that country were — well — different.

After Ailee came, and the mother went away, Rebecca naturally dropped out of church work of every sort. Up to that time she had been a

teacher in the Sabbath-school, but never a very happy one. Her scholars were of the class who would not study their lessons, would not be regular in attendance, and one by one were always dropping out, too large to come any more. She was glad to have an excuse for giving up the effort.

"I was not intended for a teacher," she wrote to Hervey in India. But he had clothed his far-away sister in the garb of all that was sweet and lovely, and believed that she had given up her work in the church only because she was called to service in the home. After Ailee graduated into that higher department, and Rebecca's heart and hands were idle, she might have gone back into Sabbath-school; but she shrank from that, and from every form of Christian work. Since her coming to the city she had wandered about from church to church, known of nobody, spoken to by none; never appearing for two successive Sabbaths in the same place, so that by chance somebody could get interested in her; and at last, since her coming to Mr. McKenzie's, she had even given up so much Christian habit as that way of living indicates. She had scarcely been to church at all. She attributed this to Mr. McKenzie's "remissness," but she knew very well that she had had abundant opportunity to ask him if there was any objection to her going to evening service, and that the housekeeper had said repeatedly, "Why, in the name of sense, don't you go to church of an

evening? The other nurses always did. There is nothing in life to hinder after Miss Lilian is asleep." Rebecca had made various answers; but she knew deep in her heart that she had lost all desire to go to church. Not that she did not still call herself a Christian; she would have been shocked to have believed otherwise. She still quite often read verses in her Bible, and — when not too much hurried, or too weary — dropped on her knees for a moment before lying down for the night; but as for having the sort of religion which makes "people happy all the time," as Hervey had expressed it, she knew nothing about it, and believed that only missionaries, and those who went early to Heaven, and a few — a very few — ministers had any such sort.

All things considered, it was with very mixed feelings that she made ready, on the Sunday morning in question, to obey Mr. McKenzie's orders. Perhaps indignation at the idea of being obliged to submit to orders was predominant.

She jerked her gloves on angrily as she thought of it, and even spoke sharply to Lilian, who, in a charming costume of white wool and fur, was fluttering about, happy in the thought of going anywhere.

Rebecca's dress was entirely appropriate and becoming. She had gone out from her father's house very well supplied with clothes, and her ability to re-make them herself had stood her in

good stead, so that now her dress of fine black cloth, made severely plain, but with minute attention to details, became her well. So did the black felt bonnet, with its three stylish plumes, which she had herself dressed over. She was all in black, as was her custom — not that she had worn mourning for her mother or for Ailee; her father had not approved of that fashion; but she had chosen, ever since, to have her dresses always black. The color suited her, was the only explanation she gave, and so, indeed, it did.

There were embarrassments connected with this church-going.

"Well, of all things!" the housekeeper said, when she heard the news. "This is a new departure. Lilian going to church? My! I pity you. Why, the little mouse won't sit still two minutes at home. But then, to be sure, she minds her father — most people do. Well, I'm glad you are going to church; it's decent, anyhow, and it won't hurt Lilian to begin. But it is kind of uncomfortable to go and sit all alone in the pew with him, isn't it? I might have left my church for one Sunday, and gone along, if he had asked me."

It was evident that the housekeeper felt slightly injured. So did Rebecca; she had answered coldly that she presumed the pew was large enough to hold both Mr. McKenzie and herself. Then she had been vexed to think that she had allowed herself to say even so much, and had gone out into

the hall with heightened color, only to meet the chambermaid, who swept her from head to foot with a stare, and said, "O, my ! ain't we scrumptious? We'll hold our head six inches higher to pay for this, and it ain't necessary at all ; it is always too high for comfort. Good luck to you ; I wouldn't be in your shoes for a ten-dollar gold piece. I'm not so fond of his lordship that I'd be willing to go to church with him. It is bad enough to meet him in the hall and be frowned at for something or other that you never did."

But the most trying experience had been in Mrs. McKenzie's room.

"And you are really going to church with Mr. McKenzie? My dear, you are a favorite, depend upon it ; he never did so much as that even for poor Helen. I do hope it will last ; but our mournful experience has been that people who get into his favor in this way suddenly get out, after a very little time, and leave us. Don't they, Lilian?"

For answer, the child, who did not understand the question, laid her lovely golden-crowned head against Rebecca's hand and said sweetly, "My Rebie ; Lilian loves her." Of her own sweet will the child had adopted the pet name which her brother Hervey had on rare occasions called her. It touched Rebecca ; she was not used to pet names.

"Yes," said Mrs. McKenzie, "your Rebie ; love

her hard, Lilian, while you can. I hope you may be able to keep hold of her."

And Rebecca had gone away with her cheeks burning, and a feeling that this was a hateful world; and the most disagreeable person in it was Mr. Dean McKenzie.

Whether Lilian was awed into quiet by the unwonted sights and sounds, or whether she was always quiet when with her father, Rebecca did not know. Certain it was that the child sat quite still, with her father's arm around her, and her head resting against him, until, when the service was half over, the lids drooped over her sweet, blue eyes, and she dropped her head still lower, and was tenderly gathered to his arms, where she slept quietly until the roll of the organ awakened her.

"She is a capital little church-goer," said Dr. Carter, coming down from the pulpit to greet the leading man in his church. "I am afraid my Nannie would have climbed over the back of the pew several times, before this; Nannie is a sad little tomboy. How do you manage, Mr. McKenzie, to have such a bit of ladyhood at this age?" Then, without waiting for reply, "I hope Mrs. McKenzie is as well as usual to-day? And this is?" — he was holding out his hand to Rebecca, and looking inquiringly at Mr. McKenzie.

"The child's nurse," said that gentleman, and before he could add anything further, if he had so designed, Rebecca spared him the trouble.

"I am Rebecca Meredith," she said gravely.

"Ah! thank you. I am glad to see you in church. We hope you and the little lady will become good church people. There is nothing like beginning early, Mr. McKenzie; I wish your good example might be followed by others of my flock."

Then Rebecca got out of the seat, and hurried down the aisle, and felt that she hated it all; and would never come to church again. She would leave Mr. McKenzie's service at once if this were made a part of her regular duties. He had no right to force her to go to his hateful church, and be stared at, and patronized by the minister, and ignored by the people. For nobody else spoke to Rebecca. As for the sermon, she had not heard it. The text had been enough for her. "Redeeming the time, because the days are evil."

Had she, then, gotten her message straight from the word of God? Nay, she had let it float her on the current of memory back into her past. She was a girl again, and Fred Pierson and she were in church together. He had been gone for weeks, and was only home on a short vacation. The minister had announced his text, "Redeeming the time," and Fred had presently secured her hymn-book and written on the fly-leaf, "Will you go with me this afternoon for a long tramp? We must 'redeem the time,' you know; I have but a day or two." Then, in memory, she had taken that

tramp over again ; her last one, as it proved, with Fred Pierson. The day had been lovely, and Fred had been — But what was the use in going over it? Was it possible that she still mourned for him? She scorned the thought! What she mourned was her lost girlhood, and her lost faith in human nature, and her mother, and her home. Poor Rebecca!

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CHAPTER IX.

VITAL QUESTIONS.

THE weeks which followed were filled with embarrassments and annoyances for Rebecca. To begin with, she hated those Tuesday lunches. It might have been difficult to have explained why, only she felt out of place and uncomfortable. Mr. McKenzie always acknowledged her presence by the gravest of bows, but he addressed no word to her other than was necessary.

"Be seated," he had said on that first Tuesday. Rebecca, after considering the matter, had resolved to stand behind Lilian's chair, and give her exclusive attention; "I thought I made it plain that you and Lilian were to lunch together. That is your habit, is it not? Very well, do not alter it."

So Rebecca, with burning cheeks, had seated herself beside Lilian, and John had waited on her with a supercilious air, and a hateful smile lurking on his face whenever he was out of the range of Mr. McKenzie's eyes.

But Lilian and her father had a thoroughly good time. She was bubbling over with delight, and her little tongue prattled continually. She gave fully as much attention to Rebecca as she did to her father; whether he liked it or not he gave no outward sign. He indulged her continually, yet deferred to Rebecca as to how she should be served; and when the child begged, despite Rebecca's protest, for a certain dainty, he said firmly, "Lilian is to obey exactly what her nurse says;" which ended the matter.

"Lilian always obeys her father," the housekeeper had said; and by inference she had implied that she obeyed no one else very well; which was true enough until Rebecca's coming. She, from the very first, had exacted implicit obedience. So when the father uttered his admonition, the child replied, gravely, "Lilian always does; Rebie makes her."

"Of course," said the father; it was his nearest approach to conversation with Rebecca.

That young woman chafed much over the prospective Sundays. It still did not seem possible to her to sit in one end of that pew, with Lilian and her father at the other, and be commented on, and pointed out as "the child's nurse."

"I wouldn't do it," said the housekeeper, sympathetically. "He doesn't own you, body and soul, because you are his little idol's nurse; and it must be awful disagreeable to sit perked up there;

you don't look as though you had been used to it. How come you to go out to service, anyway?" Finding that she was not answered, she continued: "Folks will talk about the silliest things; they talked just awful about Helen Harvey, and she never went to church with him in the world. Young women has got to take care of their character. I'd be willing to go to his church, I s'pose, if there was any need. He ought to think how things look."

"What utter nonsense!" exclaimed Rebecca impatiently, goaded to speak, though she had resolved against it. "What in the world could people find to talk about, in the fact that a man takes his own child to church with him and directs her nurse to be at hand in case the child wearies him? If your friends can make capital out of such a commonplace as that, they are welcome to do so."

"Oh! well, now," said Mrs. Barnett, drawing herself up in all the dignity of her eleven years of housekeeping for the McKenzies, "there is no need to go off like a lucifer match. You don't look like no child's nurse, now that's a fact, and I suppose you know it. Whether you believe it or not, folks will talk; they can make stories out of smaller things than this; and they ain't no friends of mine, either, that do it. My friends are as respectable as any of yours, and I don't see any call on your part to fling out at a respectable woman in this way, just because she thought it best to

give you a friendly warning. If you like the talk, why, go ahead; there'll be nobody harmed but yourself."

Then Rebecca went away humiliated. Why could she not have received the honest woman's well-intentioned word, and had her for a friend, instead of making her into an enemy? What was the matter with her in these days? She had not been wont to be so sensitive and disagreeable. But she went to church no more. Whether the housekeeper went to headquarters with her "friendly hint," and was better received, or whatever was the reason, Mr. McKenzie said to her the next Sabbath morning, when he waited in the hall for that purpose, "By the way, Rebecca, you need not accompany Lilian to church unless you choose. I shall want her ready to go with me at the proper time; but I find that she is entirely satisfied with my company, and makes no trouble. So if you prefer some other church, or prefer not to go out, you are at liberty to make your choice."

To this Rebecca had bowed, and passed on. She was relieved and angry. What right had he to dismiss her in this way from the church service?

"That, at least, is not his property," she said to herself, in bitter indignation. "But perhaps it is. He has money enough, I suppose, to control the church, and the pastor, and everything. He need not think I 'choose' to sit even in the same church with him, to say nothing of the same pew.

I hope I shall never darken its doors again. I think I will go nowhere. Perhaps I do not half believe in church any more. Mrs. McKenzie will be thankful for my company, if only to relieve her from the surveillance of Mrs. Payne for awhile. I am wanted there, at least."

So she stayed at home and nursed her wounded pride, and Lilian went gleefully away with her father, albeit she looked back regretfully to say, "Lilian wants her Rebie, too." She was very sweet. Rebecca could not persuade herself to seek work elsewhere and leave the loving little creature. Moreover, Mrs. McKenzie wanted her. In proportion as her dislike for the husband increased, she gave loving ministry to the one whom she now unhesitatingly in her thoughts called the neglected wife.

Meantime, Dr. Carter did not entirely forget his new acquaintance. Rebecca waited one afternoon in the library, for the coming of its owner; her instructions being to bring Lilian every day at this hour for a visit with her father, but on no account to leave her until he arrived. These were Rebecca's pleasantest moments in the day; for her employer was often late, and while Lilian frisked about the room she could get snatches at rare and beautiful books. She was not therefore prepared to be pleased with any sort of interruption, and looked her annoyance more than she was aware when Dr. Carter was admitted.

"I was to wait here for Mr. McKenzie," he explained, then, recognizing her, "Ah! this is" — and he hesitated.

"Rebecca Meredith," she explained, once more.

"Yes, I remember; I am glad to see you again. I have missed you from the church."

Rebecca only half believed this, and did not consider a reply necessary. But he continued:

"I do not think you have been there since that first Sabbath I saw you? Perhaps you were only a visitor and worship regularly elsewhere?"

Most earnestly did Rebecca wish she could say that such was the case; but he waited for an answer and the disagreeable truth must be spoken.

"I have not been to church since that morning."

"Indeed; do your duties here hold you on the Sabbath day?"

What was it to him whether they did or not? Her reply was a brief, dignified "No."

"Then, my friend, may we not hope to see you at our church? We shall be very glad to welcome you, and make you feel at home."

Rebecca doubted it, but had the grace to say "Thank you," albeit she did not accept the invitation. Dr. Carter apparently noticed this; evidently he was not through with her. She glanced nervously toward the door, and for the first time in her life wished for the coming of Mr. McKenzie. She did not understand why she should shrink from being catechised by this man. He was cer-

tainly kind, but either she imagined it, or there was in his manner an air of patronage such as he would not have used to a woman whom he considered as on the same social level with himself. He was regarding her earnestly, and presently said, "I hope you are a Christian?"

She felt her face grow red under his gaze; the question was very disagreeable to her. She felt the most unaccountable aversion to answering it. He waited, and there was an embarrassing silence. At last she said, with increasing coldness, if that were possible:

"I am a member of the church."

"Then, may I ask you, is religion a vital thing with you? Does it make your life happy?"

Now, indeed, she knew that her cheeks fairly blazed. The very question which her brother Hervey had once asked, and its memory had been so vivid that she had often in the intervening years found herself repeating the words, sometimes wistfully. But what right had this stranger to ask her such a thing?

As if he saw her thought, he added, after a moment, "I beg your pardon for the question, if it seems abrupt to you; but I had a reason for asking it. A religion which fills the soul and radiates in the life is sadly needed in this home, and I wondered if you were not wanted of God to do a work here which no one else seems able to do. The head of this house needs to be helped to

understand what a source of strength there is in Jesus Christ."

Always "the head of the house." If he had not added those words Rebecca might have been touched. She had thought instantly of the poor wife upstairs, and had felt her heart warm with the thought that possibly God wanted her here to comfort her. But Mr. McKenzie was another matter. She decided not to understand the remark. "I should be certainly glad to be a help and comfort to poor Mrs. McKenzie," she said, letting a little touch of feeling into her voice.

"Ah! that indeed. She needs help; but I confess I was thinking of the husband."

Now, despite her having been brought up a lady, Rebecca's lip unmistakably curled. "I can almost imagine his fine scorn at the idea of his needing anything which poor human nature could give," she said; "it is even difficult to conceive of him as willing to receive from the Lord himself."

Directly the words were out of her mouth she realized their exceeding impropriety, especially when one remembered the relation she sustained toward the man of whom she was speaking. What had happened to her that she seemed to be losing her power of self-control? What would this minister think of her? If he would only take up a book, and let her alone. But he was regarding her steadily, somewhat sorrowfully, perhaps as one disappointed.

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"And yet," he said, with exceeding gravity, "there is no one in all the list of my acquaintances who I think needs the Divine upholding arm more than Mr. McKenzie. He has heavy burdens to bear. If he could come into daily contact with one whose life would help him, simply by its daily exhibition of the power of the indwelling Spirit, I should be glad beyond measure."

"He is a good man," said Rebecca to herself, and thinking of Dr. Carter — "a good, weak man. He realizes how far from Christian living this rich sheep of his flock is, and he would like to have somebody drive him inside the fold. He would not like to do it, lest the sheep should take offense, and his own pasturage suffer thereby, but a little shepherd cur like myself might be made useful, perhaps, if he only knew how to set me at work. I don't believe it. I should have to respect a man more than I do His Honor before I could be helpful to him, if I were ever so good myself."

Aloud she said, with sudden resolution to speak plainly, in the hope that this good, dull man's eyes might be opened in another direction, "It is impossible to avoid thinking that Mrs. McKenzie's influence might be very helpful to her husband if he would give her opportunity to exercise it. Is she not a member of your church, Dr. Carter?"

He shook his head. "No; she never brought a letter to my church. I do not know her very well. I called upon her once, but she has not

cared to see me again ; and as I am not her pastor, I cannot intrude." He sighed as he spoke, and walked toward a window, looking sad and disappointed.

And Rebecca went to rescue a book from Lillian's hand, feeling vexed at both Dr. Carter and herself. What had she accomplished. And what had he ? "We are both bunglers !" she told herself impatiently. "He wants me to influence Mr. McKenzie, by my angelic life, to become a different man ; and I want him to influence Mr. McKenzie to treat his wife decently, and we can neither of us do the work we are called upon to do. I wish I had held my tongue. He does not understand what I meant. I am not surprised that Mrs. McKenzie did not care to receive his calls. He is good, and stupid."

Then Mr. McKenzie came, and she was free to leave her charge ; for he took the child in his arms and went forward with her to meet his pastor. His greeting was very cordial ; they were evidently on most friendly terms.

But though Rebecca was released from his presence, she could not so easily dismiss Dr. Carter's questions from her thoughts. It was vain for her to say that it was no concern of his whether or not her religion made her happy. There was no getting away from the thought that it ought to concern herself. The minister had asked the question, not because of any interest he had in

her, but because he wanted to set her at work for others. Well, ought she not to be at work? She had always despised drones in any line. What was her religion worth to her, or anybody else? She had assured herself that she was needed in this house for Mrs. McKenzie's sake. Could she help her in this higher department of her being? Was the pale, frail lady ready to take the awful journey which she would surely have to, ere long?

"She has failed since I have been here," thought the suddenly conscience-stricken girl. "I do not think it possible that she can be here very long, and I have never said a word to her about the other world, nor her plans in view of it. Yet she likes to have me with her, and talks to me more freely, apparently, than to anybody else. If I only knew how, I might help her in this direction—that is, if she needs help. Perhaps she is quite at rest, but some way I do not think so. I wonder if anybody is? Why, yes, I know they are. I can never forget my own dear mother, nor my beautiful young brother. How happy they were to go! It does not seem to me as though Mrs. McKenzie could die as either of them did. O, me! I wish I were out of this house. I cannot help her if she needs help in this; and there is no one to do it. I wonder why she never took her letter to Dr. Carter's church? And her husband, it seems, does not even pretend to be a Christian; at least I am glad of that."

At this point, I pause over my work, and wonder what you by this time think of Rebecca. In order to be strictly truthful concerning her, I am aware that I have placed her before you in anything but a flattering light. She is evidently proud-spirited, censorious, suspicious and unhappy. The victim of an accusing conscience, yet one who is blindly shutting her eyes to the steps which she might take to set herself at peace with her conscience. But, despite it all, I admire and love Rebecca Meredith. I insist that there are admirable and lovable qualities in her make-up; and that also she is a typical young woman, representing the unrest which gnaws at many hearts, and yet with more independence of character than many young women possess. What she shall become under the moulding process of life, remains to be seen.

CHAPTER X.

REBELLION.

THE holiday season passed, and the wild March days were upon them, without any material changes having come to the house at 1200 Carroll Place. Mrs. McKenzie still continued to live her life of steadily increasing invalidism; albeit she had days when she neither looked nor acted like an invalid. On these occasions she presided at the head of her table, received guests and paid visits. Then suddenly would come upon her one of her "poor turns," and for days together she would see no one save the ever-present Mrs. Payne.

A circumstance which steadily deepened Rebecca Meredith's indignation was the fact that at these times Mr. McKenzie saw extremely little of his wife. Rebecca had been accustomed to seeing her father, over-burdened physician though he was, forget his own comfort entirely, in cases of illness, and devote every leisure moment to his

suffering wife or children. But Mr. McKenzie apparently ate and slept, and went and came, quite as usual; sometimes contenting himself with an inquiry as to his wife's state, without seeing her at all. Rebecca could note that after each of these attacks the poor lady was paler, weaker and less interested in life than before, but she doubted if the husband saw anything of the kind.

The Tuesday lunches continued to be eaten in Mr. McKenzie's presence with more or less regularity. He was frequently obliged to be absent; he was often late, but he evidently made an earnest effort to be home at the appointed time—made more effort to accomplish this, which to Rebecca was a most trivial thing, than he did to spend an hour with his wife. Neither did the girl's respect for Mrs. Payne increase as the days passed. That good woman did not hesitate to issue her orders with a peremptoriness which amounted at times to sharpness.

"Don't go in there!" she said, with decided emphasis to Rebecca, who stood one evening knocking at her mistress's door. She was coming upstairs with a cup in her hand, and she quickened her steps as if afraid that her order would not be heeded.

Rebecca turned toward her with indignant astonishment. "Of course not," she said haughtily, "unless I am invited to do so. I knocked, Mrs. Payne, and have no intention of forcing an en-

trance. Nancy told me this morning that Mrs. McKenzie would like to see me when I could make it convenient."

"Nancy doesn't know anything about it; she cannot attend to her own business, much less to other people's. Mrs. McKenzie is much too badly off to-night to see you or anybody else." Whereupon she gently but firmly pushed past Rebecca and let herself in, closing the door after her as quickly as possible. Of course, the one thus unceremoniously shut out was angry. If she had respected the husband, she would have gone to him with the suspicion that he was deceived in his wife's nurse, and the belief that the wife was suffering at her hands. As it was, she felt impotent, and chafed under it, and nursed her indignation from hour to hour.

Into the comparative monotony of her life came, one day, a startling break. It was Tuesday, and lunchtime. Mr. McKenzie had not yet arrived, and as his orders were peremptory that Lilian should not be kept waiting for him, John was in the act of serving her and her nurse when his voice was heard in the hall. Presently he entered the dining-room, accompanied by a gentleman. Rebecca, as she raised her eyes for a moment and dropped them as suddenly, felt every nerve in her body quiver; for although she had not seen him in years, she recognized on the instant her old acquaintance, Fred Pierson. And the

last time she saw him she had supposed herself to be his intended wife! In that moment there had been an exchange of glances, and by the curious intuition which belongs to times of great excitement, Rebecca knew that the man recognized her.

"Be seated, Mr. Pierson," said his host. "John, another cover here. I try to lunch with my little daughter on this day of the week, Mr. Pierson; it is the only day in which I can reach home for luncheon; truth to tell, I am often enough deprived of the privilege of even that, but I make it when I can. This is my only little girl. How is my darling to-day? Speak to the gentleman, dear." For the "darling," regardless of the stranger, or of her waiting lunch, had sprung for her father's arms, and was being folded in them, while he talked.

"You have children of your own, have you not, Pierson?" his host continued. "No," the gentleman explained. He had had but one, and she died within a few weeks of her mother; yes, they had both died abroad, and he had not been home since, until a few weeks ago. After he was left alone he had traveled—partly on business, and partly for rest and recreation—and felt almost like a stranger in his native land.

So her friend, Carrie Stuart, was dead; and she had had a little girl who had followed her soon. Her old friend Carrie! Rebecca listened

like one in a dream ; and, in truth, her sensibilities seemed to be dreaming. How strange it must be to be dead ! And, being dead, did she know that her husband sat at this table opposite to Rebecca Mercatn, and looked at her with keen, questioning eyes, as Rebecca, without again raising her own, felt that he did ? Carrie Stuart, who had asked her that question : " Are you and Mr. Pierson engaged ? " and received the answer, " I suppose we are. " Then she had gone away and been married to him within the year. And the two had never exchanged word or note since that day. What did she think about it now ? All this time Rebecca was outwardly interested only in Lillah, giving her as patient care as usual, and Lillah's many whims required much care.

Why a perverse spirit should have gotten hold of the child on this particular day will not be known ; whether she unconsciously resented the presence of her father's guest, and was jealous of the attention bestowed upon him, or whatever was the cause, the usually well-behaved little girl interrupted conversation, and not only asked, but clamored, for the very things which she was not to have. In vain her father, to whom she addressed all her petitions, gently refused, and directed quiet ; she became more emphatic in her demands, tossed her little hands, and even kicked her feet in a way which was anything but angelic. It was not until Rebecca interposed with a low-

toned but very distinct "Lilian!" that the child paused, as though astonished at herself, and returned for a few minutes to ordinary behavior.

She fancied that the father's face flushed, but whether with annoyance at the child, or at her, for daring to show her superior authority, Rebecca could not be sure. Indeed, she was surprised that her appeal to Lilian had had any weight; for never before had the little girl presumed to act contrary to her father's slightest hint, so that rebellion was all that could have been expected of her. But the habit of obeying Rebecca had become so strong that it asserted itself, and order was restored — not, however, to last. Just as they were toying over their fruits, and Rebecca was meditating whether she should ask if she might retire with her charge, it suited Lilian to reach forward a naughty hand and demand another orange.

"No," said Mr. McKenzie gently, "Lilian must not have another orange to-day; she has eaten fruit enough."

"Yes," said Lilian perversely; "Lilian must; Lilian will."

"My child," said Mr. McKenzie, in genuine astonishment, "take your hand away from the fruit dish at once, and tell papa you are sorry for speaking such a naughty word."

But the "child" instead burst into a loud, angry scream, and kicked her feet against the table with such force as to endanger her own chair.

"Rebecca," said Mr. McKenzie, his face growing pale, but losing not one whit of his perfect self-control, "be so good as to take Lilian to her room; I will see her before I go out again."

So Rebecca bore the disgraced baby away, she resisting with all her might, and letting her piercing shrieks resound through the hall to such purpose that the door of Mrs. McKenzie's room opened, and Mrs. Payne's distressed face appeared.

"What on earth is the matter?" she asked. "Her mother thinks the child is being killed. She had just dropped asleep after an awful hour."

"I am sorry," said Rebecca, nearly breathless; "I cannot think what is the matter with Lilian. Her father had to send her from the table."

"Her father!" screamed Mrs. McKenzie. "Did she disobey him? Oh! my poor, poor baby; he will kill her! Bring her to me—bring her this instant, I say! I will have her!"

Mrs. Payne, with a look of alarm, suddenly retreated, closing the door after her, leaving Rebecca so much startled over this new development as to forget for the moment her own embarrassment. Had Mr. McKenzie, then, despite his apparent self-control, an ungovernable temper, which he wreaked on any person who dared to disobey him? What else could such an outburst from the sick mother mean? No other explanation could be given to a cry so bitter, evidently wrung from her heart. "Oh! he will kill her." Perhaps she knew

too well, through her boy Carroll's experience, how hard he could be where his imperious will was thwarted. As she struggled up to the next landing with her rebellious charge, Rebecca resolved to protect Lilian even at the risk of offending her employer. If she could but get the child out of the house for her afternoon walk before he came upstairs! Acting upon this thought, she moved about the rooms in breathless haste, while Lilian, her momentary passion having spent itself, looked on interestedly. The little one was evidently so completely a baby still that she did not apprehend dire consequences to follow her naughtiness.

"Lilian going to wide?" she asked, in her usual animated voice.

"No; Lilian is going to walk with Reb. Come here and let me put on a fresh dress, then we will go right away for a long walk."

"Papa, too?" asked Lilian serenely, as she came at once and submitted with lambl-like meekness to the process of robing, which she hated.

"No, indeed!" Rebecca answered, with energy, "papa is not going—we are going to run away alone, you and I."

"Lilian wants papa, too," said the child, with grieved lip. She was accustomed to a half-hour with him immediately after those lunches which she enjoyed, and her nurse despired.

"Poor baby!" said Rebecca, her heart swell-

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ing, "you wouldn't want him if—" She left her sentence unfinished, even in her unreasoning fear remembering that she was speaking of the child's father and must guard her words with care. There was no time for more words. Mr. McKenzie's voice was heard in the hall giving a direction to Nancy, then he knocked at the nursery door. A wild impulse to seize Lilian and escape came to Rebecca, but her judgment assured her of the folly of this, so she contented herself with seating the little girl in the great easy-chair and bidding her somewhat sharply to sit quite still until she told her to come.

Then she went forward and opened the door.

"Let me have Lilian, if you please," Mr. McKenzie said, in his usual tone. "I will take her with me to the library for a few moments, and ring when I am through with her. Come, Lilian."

The child sat perfectly still, and Rebecca spoke with nervous eagerness: "I have her nearly ready to walk. She is too warmly dressed for the house, and I promised I would take her out at once."

"She can go in a very few moments. I will not detain you long. Did you not understand me to say that I would see her before I went out? Come, Lilian."

"Rebie said 'not stir,'" explained the child, who evidently meant to be very good, perhaps to atone for her recent unusual exhibition; but she added, with marked emphasis, "Lilian wants to."

Mr. McKenzie went forward with a quick step, and lifted the little one in his arms; then, turning to Rebecca, he said, with all his ordinary courtesy, but with great firmness, "I desire my daughter to obey you in all things, and have so counseled her. But I shall have to ask you to keep steadily before her the fact that her father's will is always first." Then, apparently for the first time, noticing the peculiar mingling of indignation and alarm on the nurse's face, he added, in a tone of surprise, "What is the matter?"

"She is only a baby," said Rebecca, in intense excitement, which she tried in vain not to show; "so entirely a baby that she has already forgotten that she was naughty. I will see that such an annoyance does not occur again, if you will leave her to me."

His only reply was the grave question, "Is it possible, Rebecca, that you are afraid to trust the baby with her father?" Then he went away with the child in his arms.

Left to herself, Rebecca tramped up and down the room, like a caged lioness robbed of her young. The girl's fevered imagination had by this time planned a series of horrible experiences for her darling. It was not that she actually feared what he would call cruelty at the father's hand; but what did a strong, cold man know about correcting a little child? Had not the mother's outcry shown but too plainly what she thought of his

wisdom in this direction? Why did he not attend to his business, and leave Lillian to her, who knew how to deal with her, and who never had any trouble?

"If he had let her alone at table," the angry nurse told herself, "I could have controlled her in a moment. But his important self must be considered before all other interests. He is so afraid that somebody or something will come before his great, awful 'will,' that I am even ordered to 'keep it always first.' I shall do as I please."

Having reached this point, it occurred to her that it would be well for her to go within hearing of the library bell. The back parlor was the place where she often waited for her charge, and thither she betook herself; the immediate excitement of the hour having made her forget, for the time being, that there was probably a guest in the house.

The instant she set foot in the parlor she regretted her heedlessness; for there, standing near the piano, in the precise attitude in which he had waited for her a hundred times in her father's house, was Fred Pierson. He was looking toward the door in a listening attitude, quite as though he had heard and recognized her footsteps; and this, too, was natural. She stepped toward the hall the moment she saw him, but it was too late. He advanced swiftly, and, if she

did not wish to let the chambermaid, who seemed always within hearing, be a witness to what he had to say, she must step back again. Not in time, however, for the chambermaid heard his first word :

"Rebecca! for Heaven's sake, what does this mean?"

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CHAPTER XI.

UNREST.

WHAT right had Fred Pierson to address her in that manner? Had he not forfeited the right to address her at all? She chose to misunderstand him. She would answer him in the capacity of nurse for Mr. McKenzie's child.

"It was a mere freak of babyhood, sir," she said. "Nothing which need cause you or her father a moment's anxiety. All children have their perverse moments; she has fewer of them than most. I am waiting for her now, but I will not interrupt you." And she turned to leave the room.

He made a gesture of impatience, one which had always belonged to him, and came nearer.

"Rebecca, what on earth do I care for the crying of a child? You know I do not mean that. You must know that I have entirely different subjects to talk with you about. I came here in search of you, for the sole purpose of talking to

you about matters vital to us both? I came directly from your father's house, and was directed here. I found that McKenzie was an old business acquaintance, and when he invited me to lunch, I thought to take you unawares, and judge for myself what changes the years had brought; but I did not, and do not understand. Your father said you were boarding here; I thought they were friends, and you were studying music, or art, or something. I asked no questions, preferring to hear of the past from you; but"—

Even in her anxiety and annoyance, Rebecca could not help smiling.

"You had not expected the past to bring such changes? I understand. But you see it has; I am here in the capacity of child's nurse; doing honest work, and getting honest wages. I believed it to be far better than to burden my father with the care of me. That is all of my story which could interest you, Mr. Pierson; and as you are Mr. McKenzie's guest, and I his hired servant, unless there is something I can do for your comfort, you will, of course, excuse me."

But he held out a detaining hand. "Rebecca, you will drive me wild! Am I to blame for not understanding what necessities may have been upon you? I found your father's home just as usual, and I confess to being astonished and bewildered. But do you not believe me when I say that I came in search of you? I have been away

from the country for years ; I have known nothing about my friends, but I have not forgotten. Is it possible that you can have forgotten the past ? We were friends once."

"Yes," she said, almost mechanically ; his voice sounded so natural, his very impetuosity was as it used to be ; she seemed carried back years and years. "Yes ; we were friends once, that is true ; but the years have brought changes."

"Some friendships never change — mine do not. O, Rebecca ! what do you think it is to me to be met in this way ! I have missed you so sorely ; I have longed for you so. I have looked forward hungrily to this hour." There was actual reproach in his voice.

She roused herself to cold dignity. "Mr. Pier-son, you quite forget. The changes which years have brought cannot be bridged over by a single sentence. I am Rebecca Meredith, nurse-girl — not in any society, and not meaning to be, and nothing whatever to you. I shall have to ask you to let me go to my work."

He sprang forward. "I will not," he said angrily ; "you shall listen to me. Have I waited all these terrible months for this ? Rebecca, I tell you I must see you. You are angry with me because of what has passed. I expected that ; but there are things you do not know ; I can explain."

She interrupted his eager words, speaking with cold dignity.

"You are mistaken ; there is nothing for you to explain, and I do not care to go over any past — there is no need. Mr. Pierson, I have duties to attend to; you must allow me to pass."

"Rebecca, this is too absurd. 'Mr. Pierson' to me! Were we not promised to each other for years? What do you mean by allowing me no chance to explain? Are you so cold and cruel as that? I tell you you know nothing about it. I became involved in money difficulties; I was not to blame, but I was terribly unfortunate, and there was — well, I suppose it was carelessness upon my part, which would have made it hard for me to have succeeded in a business way had it become known. Mr. Stuart found out all about it, and he was a hard man, and would have been hard with me but for one thing — his daughter interceded; smoothed everything over, and got me offered a partnership in the business; but it was offered on the mistaken supposition that I was interested in her. Do you not understand, and do you not see how shut up I was to one line of action? What it was to me to act it out, I will not try to tell you."


"I would not," said Rebecca, indignation getting the better of her dignity. "So you married your wife to save yourself from a business embarrassment, or from being blamed, and you consider this an explanation to offer me? Verily the years have changed you, or else I was always deceived."

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"I CALL IT INSULT," SHE SAID, HER EYES BLAZING.



He was regarding her earnestly, and now he spoke with a sudden change of tone—the old tender tone which she remembered. “Rebecca, I am a wealthy man, and a lonely one. The years have left me desolate indeed. For the past few months I have lived for the thought of seeing you again. I have everything to offer you now, with no fear of business complications coming in between us. I will never ask any questions about your peculiar position here, but will take you from it the moment you give me leave, and place you where you belong—at the head of society. I had not meant to tell you this under such circumstances, but I cannot seem to make you understand. You may call it weakness, or what you will, but my heart has always been true to you; and”—

She interrupted him again. “I call it insult,” she said, her eyes blazing. “It is you who do not understand. My position here is one which you may report to all the world, if it pleases you to do so; I am the hired servant of Mr. McKenzie, and my business here is to care for his child. You seem to desire me to understand that you bought one wife for business reasons; you may be able to buy another, I do not know; but certainly I can assure you that I am not for sale—not even for the sake of being placed at the ‘head of society,’ could I for a moment think of professing to respect you, even. And now, Mr. Pierson, I shall insist upon going to my work.”

There was no time to reply. The library bell had not rung, but at that moment Mr. McKenzie appeared at the door, leading his little daughter by the hand. He looked from his child's nurse to his guest with the slightest possible uplift of eyebrows, but spoke in his usual tone.

"Lilian is ready for her walk now, Rebecca. You will not take her far, as the air is too cold; perhaps a drive afterward will atone for the shortness of the walk. I did not ring because I recognized your voice, and decided to bring Lilian to you."

As she escaped upstairs with her charge, Mr. Pierson, having not yet recovered his ordinary manner, said eagerly, "Miss Meredith is an old friend of mine; it was an utter astonishment to me to meet her here in this way."

"Indeed!" said Mr. McKenzie; "I did not observe that you recognized her in the dining-room."

"I did not; I was utterly dumfounded, and knew not how to act. Do you know who she is?"

"Only that she is my daughter's nurse, and a very faithful and reliable one."

"Nurse! Why, man alive! I tell you she is in a false position. She is a lady; educated, refined, everything that—"

"Excuse me," said his host, in the coldest tone. "Let me explain to you that I did not seek the young woman; she sought the position, and fills it well. She is not required in my house to do

anything disreputable in any way. Now, shall we look over those papers before we go out?"

As for Rebecca, she felt as though the blood was almost forcing itself through her cheeks. She felt insulted, humiliated, disgraced. How did that man dare to stand before her and try to buy her back to "society?" and offer to say nothing about the "position" in which he had found her? As though the position were in itself degrading! How did he dare talk about having been true to her all these years, when he had been the husband of another woman! For the first time in her life a feeling of pity for Carrie Stuart, the dead wife to whom he had been always, it seems, untrue, stole into her heart.

"And he insults me by thinking that what he has to say is an excuse for the way in which he treated me. What an unutterable fool he must think me. It is the first time in my life that I have been insulted!"

There was another thing which caused the angry girl to bite her lips in pain and shame. What must Mr. McKenzie have thought to have recognized the voice of his nurse in conversation with his guest, and to have found them standing as they were, in evident excitement? It was of no use for her to tell herself that she did not care what he thought; she knew it was not true. Her good name had always been dear to her, and had been shielded, as a matter of course, from

any suspicion of gossip. Now, how would it be? Leaving the master of the house out of the question, how much had that ever-present chambermaid heard, and what could she make of the words? Altogether, Rebecca Meredith felt as though the cruelties of life had shut down hard about her.

"Lilian is good," said that small maiden very gravely. There was not a trace of tears upon her baby face; there had certainly been no outcry from the library; preoccupied as she was, Rebecca felt sure that she would have heard the baby voice. There had been nothing which had ruffled her childlike calm, but there was a curious little accession of dignity about the baby which enveloped her sweetly, and made her face look almost angelic as she repeated, apparently in an effort to soothe her nurse, "Lilian is good."

"Are you, indeed?" said Rebecca, nearly smothering her with kisses. "I am glad; I am glad that there is a single good person in this great, hateful world!"

"Papa is good, too," said Lilian.

"Oh! is he?" There was a touch of vindictiveness in this answer.

"Yes," said the child, with that quiet air of assurance which some children have, that effectually cuts off all debate, and marks a foregone conclusion; "and Lilian is never going to squeal any more at luncheon, because it hurts papa."

In addition to all these outward irritations, Rebecca was, during these days, having an inward experience which she neither understood nor relished. Certain words which Dr. Carter had spoken to her during that conversation in the library, together with certain sentences in her brother Hervey's letters, had stirred within her a sense of unrest and dissatisfaction. She had always prided herself upon her sincerity; yet, as she thought of herself as a church member, she confessed to her heart that her lip would curl in scorn over any other church member who lived the inconsistent life which she did. She knew she did nothing in the world to prove her avowed belief that Christ and his cause were of first importance; she did not even attend church.

"You do not even read the Bible, nor pray!" said her awakened conscience to her distinctly, one evening, when she was revolving these thoughts; and when she indignantly denied the charge, the fairly well-educated conscience pressed it.

"No, you don't; it is folly for you to call that dash through a chapter which you occasionally give 'reading the Bible'; and that form of words which you hurry over when you are half asleep, or thinking of something else, it is a disgrace to call prayer. Honestly, now, when did you look into the Bible with a view of finding even so much as a verse there for you to order your life by? Or when did you rise from your knees with a feeling

that you had been communing with the Lord Jesus Christ, and were thereby stronger for the service which you meant to render him? You call Fred Pierson a hypocrite, and a deceiver, and scorn him in your heart; do you treat the Lord himself any better, on the whole, than Fred Pierson has treated you?"

Plain words these, to the honest woman who had, without distinctly realizing it, gloried in her thorough honesty of purpose and action. She winced before their truth, and was miserable. Gradually there grew up within her heart a half-defined purpose to have a new order of things. Religion was certainly a great deal more to some people than it was to her, and certainly she needed its help, if help could be given.

She was isolated enough from society—or, for that matter, from the world in any shape—to claim all that religion could do for her. Not Hervey in India had given up more than she had. You will note that she entirely ignored the tremendous fact that Hervey had given up home and all its privileges for Christ's sake, and she had done so in order to get away from that which was disagreeable to her. True, she told herself that she was helping her father by earning her own living; but every one of his few letters emphasized the fact that he missed her, and would like to have her at home.

Still, she quieted her questionings in this direc-

tion by dwelling on the thought that "Mrs. Meredith" was all the home he needed, else why had he sought her and brought her there? But for herself, she had nothing, and every day she felt the need of something more than her life held. So she sought for it diligently. She read many chapters of the Bible each day; she spent a much longer time on her knees than she had done in years. She went occasionally to church — not to Dr. Carter's; even the hope of finding rest for her tired soul would not have taken her there again. She chose one equally grand — not on account of its grandeur, but because it was on the same well-lighted square, and she was not afraid to go to it alone. But the service was as cold as the marble of which the church was built, so Rebecca's cold heart found no fire there.

Neither did she discover that the Bible reading helped her in the least. Three chapters, five chapters, even, one day, ten chapters — some of them long — produced no result. As for the praying, she found it simply impossible to keep her thoughts for ten consecutive seconds on the words she was saying. When she awakened to the fact that all her efforts were doing her no good, but that she rather grew worse, something very like indignation took possession of her mind. What did people mean by saying that the "consolations of religion" were sufficient to all human needs? She had heard the phrase hundreds of times.

What consolation had she ever found in religion? When one came squarely down to the question, what had she found in it which she could honestly say to poor Mrs. McKenzie was sufficient to fill her starved heart, and make up for the absent son and indifferent husband, and give her hope and rest, in view of the coffin and the grave, which were coming nearer to her with every passing day?

Rebecca was honest with herself; she knew that while a vague desire to be helpful to Mrs. McKenzie had been the chief motive power which had led her in quest of a different religious experience, she shrank more than ever from trying to turn that lady's thoughts in any such direction, because she had nothing to offer. More than one letter she commenced to Herve, in the hope of winning from him some explanation that she could understand; but she tore them all up before they reached completion; when she laid bare her inmost thought concerning this matter it sounded so utterly unlike the language which people were wont to use in such connection, that she felt it would simply shock her brother.

Occasionally she had moods in which she would resolve to give up every semblance of a religious life; to cut herself loose from church and Bible, and all pertaining to it, and center her heart on Lilian, who grew hourly dearer to her; but there were obstacles in the way of this decision. In the first place, it was not an easy thing for a girl

religiously educated as she had been, with a brother in India and a mother and brother in Heaven, to say nothing of the little Ailee who had gone there to wait for her—to cut loose from all her moorings and drift; she shivered when she quietly thought of such a thing, and discovered that she wanted to hold on to even the painted badge labeled "Religion," which was all she had. Moreover, her face darkened when she looked at Lilian and thought of the fading mother, and thought of the second mother who would without doubt be set up in the home, and then Lilian would be wrested from her.

Turn which way she would, life was a dreariness. All this, you are to understand, was kept to her most secret self. Outwardly Rebecca Meredith was a quiet, self-sustained woman, who would not impress anybody as having a hungry heart. I wonder how many of the women and men we meet in society, wearing a composed, even a satisfied, surface, are really slowly starving?

CHAPTER XII.

TRUSTED.

MARCH had spent itself, and it was on one of those balmy April days which are the forerunners of real spring, that the next experience of a startling character came to Rebecca. During the weeks which had intervened since her encounter with Mr. Pierson, she had held herself carefully from any place where she would be likely to meet him. Twice she had sent down word by Rogers, who had brought her a special message, that she was not to be seen. She had returned a long, closely-written letter, in which Mr. Pierson had repeated in detail the story which he had told her in those few excited sentences in the parlor, with these words written on the margin :

"I have read this. If it hurts you to have me say what is simple truth, I am sorry, but it must be said. Your statement only intensifies the fact that I have lost a friend, and can never find him. Of course I am sorry, for I had not many friends, but when one loses respect for a person, all is lost.

"REBECCA MEREDITH."

As for Mr. McKenzie, he neither by word nor sign indicated that he remembered to have surprised his guest and servant talking together in the parlor. There had been a little episode about which she knew nothing. Mrs. Barnett, the housekeeper, had come to him with an important and distressed face and these words on her lips: "I don't know whether it's my business, sir, but I think maybe you ought to know that there have been some queer goings-on with Rebecca."

Mr. McKenzie had wheeled abruptly from the pile of papers he was overturning, and addressed her anxiously: "What is it, Mrs. Barnett? Has anything happened to Lilian?"

"O, no!" said the housekeeper, a trifle flurried. "Miss Lilian is all right, sir; but Rebecca—Nancy saw her in the parlor talking with that strange gentleman you brought to lunch, and being excited-like, and some queer words passed between them, when one considers who she is."

"Oh! is that all?" Mr. McKenzie had said, and turned back to his papers. Then, seeing that she waited, expectant, he had added, "It is of no consequence, Mrs. Barnett; if my guest was a gentleman, it is to be hoped that he knew how to treat a woman, no matter where he found her; and if Rebecca had anything to say to him, she would naturally go to the parlor to say it. You and I have nothing whatever to do with the matter. As for Nancy, advise her not to stand about the

halls listening to conversations not intended for her ears." Then he had absorbed himself entirely with those papers, and Mrs. Barnett had understood that she was dismissed, and had trotted away muttering that Rebecca might meet the President of the United States in the parlor, and run away with him, after this, for all she would interfere.

Perhaps the day had something to do with the unusually nervous and perverse spirit which had Rebecca in possession. Those first spring days were full of vague memories connected with girlhood, and free-heartedness, and mother, and Hervey. She and Hervey used to be fond of taking long walks in search of the very first spring flowers, or of any green and pretty thing which would hint of the coming summer. She could seem to smell the very breath of the woods as they were in those young days, and feel the breath of the soft spring wind. She was very happy in those days — never lonely at all. The thought of them made her restless; helped her to feel that she was at odds with life. In short, she was all ready to be rasped, and she found something, early in the morning, to rasp her.

She, too, overheard a conversation. Not that she was, like Nancy, standing about in the halls waiting for it. She had gone to Mrs. McKenzie's room in response to a summons from that lady, and a moment afterwards Mr. McKenzie had knocked.

"There is Deane," said his wife hastily, "and I am not ready for company. Never mind, Rebecca, step into my dressing-room. Mr. McKenzie will not be here but a moment ; he never is."

Rebecca had obeyed orders, and was out of sight before the lady invited her husband to enter. Then, apparently, the girl in the dressing-room had been forgotten. At first their conversation was carried on in low tones, and Rebecca, absorbed in her own thoughts, gave no heed. But suddenly Mrs. McKenzie's voice rose in earnest pleading. "O, Deane ! I beg of you let me do it ; I have not asked you in a long time ; now I entreat you. If I were able, I would go on my knees to you and implore it."

Then her husband's voice, cold and stern. "Cornelia, this is nonsense ! I shall have to avoid coming in here at all if I am to be besieged in this way ; you know only too well that I cannot do anything of the kind ; you must not ask me again."

Then came a low wail, almost like that of a wounded animal.

"O, Deane, Deane ! to think that you, who are so kind to others, can be so cruel to me ; and I am your wife, the mother of your children. And I have tried so hard to please you. Deane, you used to love me once ; let me beg you by the love you once bore me —"

He interrupted her. "Cornelia, this is unbearable. I will not stay to listen to you. When you

are in a more rational mood I will speak to you about what I came in to attend to."

A moment afterwards the door was closed with decision, and, by the low sobbing which she heard, Rebecca knew that the lady was alone. She felt almost distracted by conflicting emotions. How could a man so insult his wife? What was it the poor lady wanted which his insufferable pride, or indomitable will, could not grant? On the other hand, why had Mrs. McKenzie humiliated herself and him by allowing a third person to be a listener to such words? She must have known that every word could be distinctly heard; the door was ajar, and Rebecca had not felt at liberty to close it. Perhaps Mrs. McKenzie, in the intensity of her desire, had forgotten her presence. Such must be the case. Now, what could she do? There was no means of escape from the dressing-room save by passing through the large room, and, judging Mrs. McKenzie by herself, the girl thought that to appear at that moment would be but an added humiliation. She stood still, her whole being athrob with indignant pity. But she had not long to wait. A few moments, and Mrs. McKenzie called to her in a natural tone of voice, "Come out, my dear; Mr. McKenzie's calls are always brief."

Rebecca came in haste, admiring the lady's remarkable self-control, and relieved to find that she looked much as usual, though perhaps there was a

little more color in her face; but so far was she from tears that her eyes looked almost unnaturally bright.

"Drop the window a little more," she said; "the room seems unreasonably warm. These forerunners of summer always oppress me. Isn't it wonderful to think that it is April again? I did not think I should be here for another April." Her eyes remained bright, but those of her listener suddenly dimmed with tears. Nothing any sadder than this poor lady's decline, which was apparently unobserved by any but herself and her child's nurse, had ever touched Rebecca's life. The sympathy in her eyes seemed to unseal still further the invalid's lips. "Do you know, Rebecca, that I am dying, and nobody knows it?"

"Dear madam, why do you not speak plainly to somebody — to your husband? Is he not deceived?"

"O, deceived! Of course he is. I think he has decided not to let himself know that I am failing; and he has such a resolute will that what he decides to do, he does. There is no use in my trying to explain anything to him. Did you not hear some of the things he said this morning? He has made himself believe that I am too thoroughly an invalid to know my own mind, or to be trusted as to what would help me, and therefore it is his duty to thwart me as he would a rebellious child who did not know what was for her best good. I

will tell you what would help me more than anything — if I could have you with me sometimes instead of that wearying Mrs. Payne. Perhaps you could compass it yourself. If you and Mrs. Payne would exchange work. Lilian is fond of her, and it would be such a rest to me to have your care. What if you should yourself speak to Mr. McKenzie about it?"

Rebecca winced visibly. "Dear madam," she said earnestly, "nothing would give me greater pleasure than to serve you in this, or any other way in my power, but aside from the fact that it would seem to Mr. McKenzie a very improper thing for me to dictate what my work should be, I think — I beg your pardon for saying so — but it seems to me it would be almost an insult to you for me to do so. I cannot understand why, if you wish my services, you do not so direct, without reference to anybody."

Mrs. McKenzie laughed lightly. "You are not a married woman," she said significantly. "If you were, you would understand that a woman's directions are those which her husband chooses to have her give. Never mind, we will compass it somehow."

Over which reply Rebecca grew only more exasperated; not with the fair invalid, but with the man who had led her to suppose that all husbands were tyrants. Did not she know how courteously her father had deferred to his wife's opinions, so

that her very wishes were a recognized law in the household?

All this prepared the girl for the afternoon's experience.

Lilian had gone with her father for a drive, and Rebecca was at leisure. It was Mrs. Payne who came to her with a troubled face. "Could you sit with Mrs. McKenzie and let me lie down a bit? I was up the most of the night—she had a horrid night—and I feel one of my worst sick headaches coming on. I don't have them often, I am thankful to say, but I am afraid this will use me up unless I get some rest."

Rebecca was entirely willing, and felt that the woman's evident reluctance to leave her charge was almost an insult; so were the numerous directions which she received.

"Remember, now, that it won't be time for her drops for hours yet; I shall be up long before that. Sometimes she gets a notion that she doesn't feel so well, and ought to have them oftener, or something; if she does, and fusses about it, you just call me. You will remember not to give her the medicine, won't you?"

"Of course," said Rebecca, in very short tones. "If she desires a drink of water, I suppose I may get it for her?" The question was intended to be sarcastic in the extreme, but the sarcasm was lost on the good woman.

"Why—I suppose so," she said slowly, her fore-

head wrinkled with apparently anxious thought; "she doesn't often ask for water, but that couldn't do any harm. Goodness knows I wish I didn't have to leave her, but I'm afraid I can't take care of her to-night unless I do."

"I do not see any reason for your not leaving her as long as you please," said Rebecca, who thought the whole scene was intended to impress her with the excellent care which was taken of the invalid, and the immense importance of Mrs. Payne's services. "I have cared for invalids before; I have no fears but that I shall be able to make her comfortable."

Mrs. McKenzie was almost gleeful. "Isn't it delightful that she is threatened with sick headache? poor old thing! That sounds wicked, doesn't it? but I do get so tired of her. I knew this morning that she was dreading an attack, but I was careful not to hint anything of it to Mr. McKenzie, he would have worried so; he thinks my life depends on having her hover over me. It is unreasonable, isn't it, to get up such an aversion toward a good, faithful woman? It isn't very deep, you know; I simply want a change. Your young, pleasant face rests me."

She was very talkative, and her eyes were bright—unnaturally so Rebecca could not help feeling. "There is a real hectic flush on her cheeks," she told herself anxiously. "I am sure she has fever. If father were her physician, he

would think he must see her every day, at least, and the doctor has not been here for three days. Her husband will injure himself with anxiety for her, I am afraid." The sarcasm and ill-humor were all hidden, and Rebecca exerted herself to the utmost to give her charge a pleasant hour. At first she succeeded; but presently it was evident that the lady was growing uncontrollably nervous. She resisted all urgings to lie down and rest. "No, no!" she said, almost irritably; "I am tired of the sight of that couch; don't coax me to it. No, indeed, I don't want you to call Mrs. Payne; I hope she will sleep until midnight at least. I'll tell you what I want, dear; my head aches. I do not often have headaches, but this spring air has been too much for me. In the secret compartment of my writing-desk is a phial of soothing drops which I take sometimes when these spring headaches begin. I lost the key to my desk, and only found it this morning. Give it to me, please, and let me have a glass of water, and I will take a little; they have a very prompt effect, and I shall escape severe headache thereby."

Rebecca arose irresolutely. This was not her regular medicine; it was some soothing drops which she took only occasionally for headache. There certainly could be no harm in aiding her to it, despite what the nurse had said. The nurse was treating her like a baby, which was the worst

possible thing for an invalid ; she had heard her father say so.

" You are sure you ought to take it ? " she said doubtfully, as she came with the glass of water, having pushed the writing-desk within reach before she rang for it.

Mrs. McKenzie laughed reassuringly. " Of course, my dear ; don't you begin to fidget ; I am nearly worn out now with people who fidget. Mrs. Payne thinks I am seven years old, and Mr. McKenzie is almost as bad. I have taken these drops for as many years as you are old, and know all about them. It is a prescription made for me by a dear old physician who knew what he was doing."

Nevertheless, Rebecca was far from pleased with its effect. Very soon after it, Mrs. McKenzie signified her willingness to lie down, and was presently in so deep a sleep that it might have been called a stupor. Her attendant hovered over her, growing more and more disturbed at her appearance, and more anxious as to the service which she had performed. What if the poor lady had chosen the wrong bottle, or forgotten the amount ? Or what if, after long lying unused, some chemical change had taken place in the mixture which made it dangerous ? She knew there were such possibilities.

At last, finding her nervous fears deepening, instead of being reasoned away, she could endure

it no longer, but went in search of Mrs. Payne. That poor woman, although her head was bound about with a napkin, and she looked ill enough to have a nurse for herself, was on the alert in a moment.

"What is it?" she asked anxiously. "Is anything wrong? I had a feeling that there would be; somehow. I never leave her that something doesn't happen. But I don't see what could. What's the matter?"

"I do not know that anything is," said Rebecca, who, now that she had gotten away from her charge, felt sorry that she had yielded to what was probably nervousness; but she is sleeping, and the sleep is so heavy that it worries me; there is something unnatural about her, but I do not know how to describe it."

Whereupon Mrs. Payne uttered an exclamation which was unintelligible, and hastened away, followed by Rebecca.

For a single instant she bent over the sleeping woman, the next she turned almost fiercely upon Rebecca.

"You have disobeyed your directions," she said, "and given her something. Mr. McKenzie is mistaken in you; you are no more to be trusted than the rest of them."

CHAPTER XIII.

SUSPENSE AND BEWILDERMENT.

EVEN should she live to be a very old woman, I do not think that Rebecca will forget the night which followed. She had been too much frightened by Mrs. Payne's manner to resent her words or to ask questions. And the next moment she had heard Lilian's voice in the hall calling her, and had been obliged to go to her charge. But she knew by many indications for the next few hours that there was unusual anxiety in the household. The bell which communicated with Mrs. McKenzie's room rang sharply again and again, and servants ran hither and thither, executing Mrs. Payne's orders. Rebecca knew that the physician had been sent for in haste, and that Lilian had been interviewed by Rogers to learn, if possible, where her papa had driven when he set her down at home. Something very serious was undoubtedly the matter. Even Nancy was subdued, and volunteered the information that it

was believed downstairs that "Mrs. Payne thought mistress was going to die, she was that scared and flurried, and had told them to bring Dr. Caruthers, or some other doctor, that very minute; and nobody knew where Mr. McKenzie was, for all he had said to Miss Lilian was that she was to go directly to her nurse, as he should have to hasten to make up for the time he had spent with her; and wouldn't it be dreadful if she should die before they found him?"

Rebecca, in her misery, answered Nancy so sharply that the girl repented her friendliness; then she went back to Lilian, and held herself rigidly in check while she attended to her wants as usual, and tried to respond to her prattle about papa and her drive, and how he had promised to take mamma next time if she was well enough. Meantime, she listened, with ears strained to unnatural quickness, for the sound of the husband's voice, for the outgoing of the doctor whom she knew had arrived, and wondered how she should live through the next hour unless she could herself ask him if the woman was going to die, and if she had helped to kill her? Apparently Mrs. Payne had kept her own counsel, no word of the "soothing-drops" having reached even Nancy's ears—and Nancy was a person who heard all that was said. Rebecca did not know whether to be glad or sorry for this.

"I shall tell them," she said to her troubled

heart. "I shall tell everybody ; I have nothing to hide. I may have done wrong, and it is dreadful to have helped such a thing, but I surely thought it was right to do. They are all to blame as much as I. There should not have been medicine left in the charge of a suffering woman who did not know just how to use it, and I should have been warned of such a possibility. Well, I was warned, or rather ordered, not to give her any medicine, but nothing was explained to me. Still—oh ! I suppose I was to blame. What shall I do if she dies ? What shall I do ? How can I tell that dreadful man that I helped to kill her ? If he would care, it would be less horrible than to almost know that he will be glad to have her gone."

Convinced by such wild thoughts that she was not capable of thinking intelligently, and that if she was to take proper care of Lilian she must cease to think, as much as possible, she struggled through the time as best she could.

For the last hour she had heard nothing, save that which the opening and closing of doors and the hurrying of feet through the halls had told her. Whether the doctor was still in the house ; whether Mr McKenzie had been found ; whether there was hope, or whether all was over, she could not determine. She had nerved herself to believe that the soothing potion was a poison, and that enough had perhaps been taken to cause death.

She had even in imagination been all through the scenes which she knew must follow. The investigation, the examining of herself as a witness, her father's bewilderment and dismay when he should be summoned to her aid and hear the story.

Meantime, Lilian, with a premonition of something unusual in the air, asked painfully searching questions. "Had she staid with mamma that afternoon? Was mamma 'pitty well' to-night? Why did not she send for her to kiss her good-night? Why did not papa come for his kisses? Would mamma want her early in the morning? Would mamma be 'all well' some day, and take care of her like Claire Benedict's mamma did?"

Would the child never fall asleep and leave her miserable nurse to indulge her misery? At last she was at liberty to steal out into the hall in search of news. No one was visible in the now quiet house save Dr. Carter, who sat in one of the hall chairs below as if himself waiting for news. Yet he must have heard something since she had, and Rebecca went down and stood before him, white-faced and trembling, trying to make her lips form a question. They quivered so she could hardly control them to whisper, "Did she — is she dead?"

"O, no!" he said quickly; "the immediate danger is now over, but it was a very narrow escape. Poor woman, she cannot hope to come so close to death another time and not go beyond

human aid. Did you think she was gone? It must have been a shock to you. You have been with the poor little one, I suppose? I almost said the motherless little one. My heart aches for her. I can only hope, with trembling, that she will grow up to be a comfort to her father. I was waiting in the hope of seeing him, but I do not know that I ought to attempt it to-night. He is still in his wife's room. I ought to go. Perhaps I may leave a message with you to the effect that if there is anything I can do for him—if he needs me in any way, or would like to see me—he is not to hesitate to send for me at any hour of the night."

Rebecca, in the sudden revulsion of feeling which had come to her with the blessed news, could scarcely repress an exclamation of contempt for the man who could at such a time think only of the husband, and think in that strain. Congratulations, of course, were supposed to be in order, but surely he could wait until morning for them. Dr. Carter had spoken almost as though he thought the husband might be disappointed in the result, and in need of sympathy. However, she promised to see that his message reached the housekeeper, and waited to see him from the door before she went slowly back toward the stairs, so spent with her hours of intense excitement as to feel dizzy, and almost as if she were going to faint. Also she felt half-angry. Why could not somebody have come to tell her that the danger was

over? Then she reflected that nobody, unless it were Mrs. Payne, and possibly Dr. Caruthers, knew why she should be in direst need of information for her own sake. Yes, probably Mr. McKenzie knew by this time all about it. Suddenly there flashed over her the thought that she had not only done contrary to Mrs. Payne's directions, but to his. Then the probability was that she would be discharged. Almost a groan escaped her at this thought. So completely had Lilian wound herself about this girl's hungry heart that the idea of giving her up to the care of another was almost like parting with Ailee over again. Moreover, there was Mrs. McKenzie, who she felt had wanted her; though, to be sure, she might feel differently after this.

"But she would not," said the poor girl; "she would forgive me. If I helped her to make a terrible mistake, she would know that it was because I loved her and wanted to help, not hurt, her. It is only that cold, heartless man who would never forgive or overlook."

At this point in her thoughts she became conscious that there were voices at the head of the stairs — or a voice. She recognized it as Mrs. Payne's; now, if she were less dizzy and could quicken her steps, she might hear from headquarters just how the sick one was, but she could not hasten; the stairs seemed whirling past her; yet she could hear: "You must tell her yourself,

Mr. McKenzie; I can't and that's the whole of it. She didn't understand, of course, and that is the way the blunder came; and it hasn't been the way to do, according to my thinking, and it can't be that way any more, of course; but it is your plain duty, I think, to tell her just what you want her to know; and the sooner it is done, the better."

The listener had made no attempt at reply, but had turned and walked down the long hall to the back stairs, as though he meant to avoid meeting any person. And as fast as she could make her trembling limbs move, Rebecca climbed the rest of the stairs and sought her own room, where she threw the window wide and leaned out into the night air, and tried to bring her will to bear upon the faintness and dizziness which possessed her. Without reasoning about it, she felt as certain as though she had heard her name, that she was the person who was to be told that evening something. What could it be but that her services were no longer needed in that house? The angry nurse was not even willing that she should wait until morning for her dismissal; she had probably instantly demanded thus much as the condition of her own stay.

Rebecca told herself haughtily that she could go; there were people who would be only too glad to secure her services. For that matter, she could go home; only she knew in her heart that

this would be a last resort — but the home was open to her. So were other places ; she even thought, in that strange way in which one will think of absurd things in moments of great excitement, of Fred Pierson's willingness to place her at "the head of society." Then she looked over at the sleeping Lilian, and the tears came thick and fast. For her sake she would humiliate herself before the angry husband, and agree to almost any demand of his, if only he would let her stay and care for Lilian. Yet she knew that he would not ; she assured herself that he would be in haste to get her out of the house. It was not that she had periled the life of his wife ; she had disobeyed his orders.

Then there was a soft tap on her door, and she dried her eyes hastily to confront Rogers, who told her that Mr. McKenzie wanted to see her at once in the library. She went downstairs asking herself whether he would want her to go that night or if he would be willing to have her wait until daylight. She was angry again before she had knocked at the library door. There was in response a sound which she interpreted as an invitation to enter, but she must have been mistaken. Mr. McKenzie was seated before his table, his head bowed in his hands, and groans such as Rebecca had never heard before, were issuing from him. She stood still, appalled before such evident agony. Could Dr. Carter have been misinformed? Was

Mrs. McKenzie gone, and was this the agony of remorse? What ought she to do? Retire from a place where she had nothing to say and evidently was not wanted, or wait until he should remember that he had summoned her?

She had not long to wait; she took a step backward, meaning to take it very quietly, but she jostled against the door and it closed with a slam. Mr. McKenzie sat upright and turned toward her a perfectly tearless face, the pallid misery of which roused a throb of pity. Then he arose at once.

"I beg your pardon," he said, his voice sounding hollow and unnatural, "I did not hear you enter."

"I knocked, and thought you asked me in. Rogers said you wanted me."

"Yes, I must see you; I have things to say to you." The sentence ended with one of those indescribable groans.

Rebecca spoke hurriedly, hardly knowing what she was saying: "Dr. Carter told me she was better — was out of danger. Is it not true? Is she gone?"

"No, thank God; she is out of danger, I think, for this time. I could not have her die so. O, my God! I could not."

The agony on his face was something awful to behold. He covered it again with his hands, and his whole body shook under the violence of his grief. What Rebecca felt can be better imagined

than described. The strongest sensation, perhaps, was one of utter bewilderment.

But Mr. McKenzie was by education a self-controlled man. In a very few moments he raised his head again. "I ought to beg your pardon," he said. "I do not often lose control of myself, but this has been a terrible strain. Sit down, Rebecca; there are some things which I ought to say to you. The time has come when they must be said; perhaps I should have said them before, but it seemed to me that I could not. You have been very kind to my wife, and have been much with her of late. Have you no knowledge of the character of her illness?"

Rebecca shook her head, while a thousand bewildered thoughts ran riot through her brain. What could he mean? How should she have knowledge of a case which seemed to baffle the skill of the physicians? Was it possible that there was truth in her old theory of insanity? No, she did not believe it; she had seen something of insane persons; there had been nothing in Mrs. McKenzie's words or manner during the many hours she had spent with her to make such a thought reasonable.

Mr. McKenzie waited, as if to give her time to decide; then he said, "And yet you are a physician's daughter? Have you never heard of the habit induced by the curse called opium?"

Like a revelation it flashed upon her — the key

to all the mysteries which this house had contained. Its mistress was an opium user. Yes, she had heard of such, but not often. The knowledge of such a curse had not touched her nearly enough to have caused a suspicion of its presence here; but once suggested everything was clear. This explained the humiliating surveillance which had surrounded the poor woman, and which she had resented for her. That soothing potion which she helped to administer must have been the drug in some form. What must they think of her? What could she say to the waiting husband? She turned toward him, her cheeks aflame.

"Mr. McKenzie, to say that I bitterly regret my share in this evening's terror and pain seems almost insulting; but indeed I had not the remotest suspicion that the drops she wanted were other than some harmless nervine which she was in the habit of taking. Yet I ought not to have done it; I cannot expect you to forgive me."

"You did what you thought was right," he said gravely. "I am myself to blame for guarding my terrible secret with such jealous care. I can see now that it would have been better to have confided in you before. But for the child's sake, as well as for my own, I longed to shield her mother. She told you the truth about the drops from her standpoint; she is a victim of a physician's prescription, given years ago. She made a brave struggle until her whole system was so diseased

that she could not struggle. For years it has been a living death. There are times when I cry to a merciful God that I can bear no more."

Again that deathly pallor overspread his face, and he sank once more into the chair from which he had risen, and buried his face in his hands.

Rebecca stood for a moment, regarding him with a look of unutterable pity, then turned and went softly and silently away. What had she to say that would not be mockery before such sorrow as this?

CHAPTER XIV.

REVELATIONS AND DECISIONS.

MRS PAYNE had more to tell her. "I see you've found out what is going on in this house," she said, scanning Rebecca's face closely. "And high time, too; I've been that put out at times seeing how entirely 'off' you were in your calculations that I found it hard work to hold my tongue. I don't talk about the poor thing where it ain't necessary, but I told Mr. McKenzie months ago that he ought to let you know what was what. But he couldn't bear to do it, and you can't blame him for that."

Apparently Mrs. Payne was another whom Rebecca had wronged. She thought of it, but put it away for a more convenient hour, and asked the questions which were pressing upon her.

"Were the soothing drops she spoke of" --

She hesitated, and Mrs. Payne finished the question.

"Laudanum, of course. You might have known,

though I don't know how you should. I'd have left a wild tiger shut up in the room with her rather than that, if I had known she had it. When she slipped it into her secretary and locked it up without our knowing about it beats me."

"She said it had been there for some time, but she had lost the key, and only found it this morning."

"O, yes!" with a wise nod of her head; "she can account for things; she is good at it. The only trouble is it isn't true. She had her desk, key and all, day before yesterday, and there wasn't any laudanum hidden away in it — you can trust me for that. It was just one of her get-ups; I'm used to them." Then, seeing Rebecca's look of horror, she hastened to explain. "It is the disease it gives them, child; don't you know? They aren't capable of telling the truth, and are no more to be believed, nor to be blamed, for that matter, than a crazy person. I know all about it; I've been with worse patients than she is, enough sight, though I never saw one who suffered more with it, poor thing. I thought to-night she was going, sure; and I was half-glad, as well as awfully scared and sorry. What is the use of her living any more? She is no comfort to herself, and a daily misery to him."

"Mrs. Payne, how does she get the laudanum, or — whatever it is?"

"You may well ask that; but it will take Satan

to answer you. If he doesn't help her I don't know who does. I've spent the best part of my life, and so has he" — the last pronoun referred to Mr. McKenzie — "trying to outwit her, and every once in a while she has been too cunning for both of us. He couldn't quite shut her up like an insane person, because there are days and weeks at a time when she is as sane as I am, and it would have made talk, you know. He has sat up nights, poor man, to contrive ways to keep folks from talking about her. You see she has some friends who listen to her plaintive little stories and believe them, of course, and are sorry for her, and think he is hard and cold, and all but cruel to her now. These friends take delight in doing little errands for her, because she is neglected, you know, and she is cute enough to send them to some out-of-the-way druggist who will fill any prescription for money, and no questions asked. In that way and dozens of others she has contrived to get what she wanted. When poor Carroll was at home it was easier managed. He could not understand why he should not do his mother's errands, and his father would not tell him. He said it was better to keep him away, and let him think he had a mother. But I don't agree with him there, either. I think the boy might have been trusted. I'll tell you what it is, Rebecca, the man has his faults, I dare say, but take him all in all, through the seventeen trying

years that I've lived in the same house with him, and worked at the same job, you may say, I never saw one who come up to my notion of what a man ought to be any better than he does. The things he has borne for her, and the ways he has contrived to help her, and shield her, and all that, would make a stone cry sometimes. Mercy! I could tell you things, if it would do any good — nights when he hasn't closed his eyes nor sat down; just spent the time wandering about the streets in search of her, and getting her home quietly, so nobody would be the wiser for her slipping away."

"Nights!" repeated Rebecca, in wide-eyed horror.

"Yes, nights; lots of them. That was years ago, before he had made up his mind that he must just fix things at night so she could not get out of those three rooms of which she has the range; she used to manage to get away from us, and wander around the streets. I've seen him dash out of this house like a crazy man when he found it out. But he always got her back, and was just as kind and patient with her as though she had been out visiting the sick, or something of that kind. Oh! he is a man in a thousand. But he had to come to it, and fix things at night so there was no getting out. I wouldn't have staid alone if he hadn't; and to have two nurses for a woman who was able to make calls and receive company

wouldn't have looked well, you know. He has thought of every little thing, and tried to save her name in every way. And he has succeeded so well that I believe half the people who come here think she is an angel of light, and he is a cold-blooded villain of some sort. Sometimes it makes my blood boil, though I'm fond of her, poor lady, and realize that she is no more to blame than a creature who has lost her senses is.

"You would better go to bed; you look fit to drop, and I don't wonder. I was scared myself, and I've seen her in those dead sleeps I was going to say a thousand times; but every one is more dangerous than the last, you know, and she did come very near it this time. I could see that in the doctor's eyes, if I hadn't been able to tell for myself. If I had been a praying woman I should have asked the Lord to spare her to say good-by to her children, though she hasn't been much of a mother to them. Not but what she thinks enough of them, too, after her fashion. It has given me the heartache many a time to say 'no' to her when she was coaxing for Lilian. There's another of his trials, poor man; had to force the mother away from her baby, you may say. You see, she was just possessed to give the child some of her soothing drops; she liked them so well herself that when the baby was fretful or troublesome in any way she couldn't seem to keep herself from pouring something of the kind down her throat.

The last time the father caught her at it he looked just like death ; it was the next day that he made a law that the child shouldn't be left alone with her for a single minute. Oh ! he has had a life of it, and mercy only knows how it will end."

And then, Rebecca having heard all, and more than it seemed to her she could endure, made her escape and sought her own room, every nerve quivering with pain. What had she not learned since she left it but a half-hour before? Strangely enough, it seemed to her that the most startling revelations had been about herself. She had so prided herself upon her powers of discrimination, upon her excellent judgment, upon her ability to read character almost at a glance. Now she stood revealed to herself as a woman who had daily wronged in her thought of him a man who was staggering under a weight of trouble so peculiar and so heavy that she wondered it had not crushed him. What she had named hardness of heart was, it appeared, almost infinite self-control. In the light of her present knowledge she recalled looks and words of his which revealed him as one who could suffer cruel injustice in silence, and continue his patient care and kindness all the while. Almost she felt as though she must go down to him and beg his pardon for every unworthy thought she had had concerning him.

Nor did her self-accusing spirit stop here. How sure she had been that Mrs. Payne was unworthy

of the trust imposed upon her. Confident in her own superior judgment she knew it had been only her low opinion of Mr. McKenzie which had held her from going to him with a story which would surely have added much to his burden. Now it seemed to her that Mrs. Payne's life of patient endurance and forbearance with a woman who had brought her illnesses upon herself was little short of sublime. The more carefully she went over the story of her life in this house, the more humiliating became her estimate of herself. Even poor Nancy giving her sympathy or her indignation indiscriminately to "master" and "mistress," according as passing events vexed her or touched her heart, seemed more reasonable and endurable than herself. Not a person in the house had she judged worthy of her sympathy or respect, save the woman who was the deliberate cause of all their sorrow. Nor had her sweeping condemnations been confined to the dwellers in the house. Had she not pronounced Dr. Carter a money-serving hypocrite because he was always trying to sympathize with the husband, and gave little thought to the wife? Probably Dr. Carter knew the whole story. She felt her cheeks burn with shame when she thought of how she had answered his appeals for help from her.

But she went farther back in her self-accusations. Was it not just possible that she had even wronged "Mrs. Meredith?" She went over in memory her

treatment of that lady, and of her father since he had brought home his new wife, and this strangely-awakened conscience of hers would not exonerate her even here. It persisted in assuring her that her father certainly had a right to marry again if he chose, and did not deserve punishment at her hands for the deed. It reminded her that Mrs. Meredith had made persistent and kindly attempts to regard her as one of them, and that she had on every such occasion held aloof. It even hinted that she had been jealously afraid of Ailee lest the stranger should steal a portion of her love, and had held her away from the new mother as much as possible.

Going over the ground carefully, she could not find any accusation to bring against the woman who occupied her mother's place that was at all satisfactory to her now. Yet she had lived for months in the belief that she was a desolate, wronged girl, almost of necessity an exile from her father's house, and with no one to love or care for her. Had she not even of late yielded to the feeling that Hervey in India was absorbed with his work, and indifferent as to whether or not he heard from her regularly? As for Fred Pierson — for even his name came in for a share of this sweeping self-denunciation — had not time proved conclusively that she was no judge of character, even when she had daily opportunity for years of studying it? Would one who had within him in

those early days the elements of true manhood have developed as he did? Would one who deserved her love have been guilty of the despicable sin of marrying for position, and of coming back in after years to insult her with the humiliating story? Yet what was she that she should speak so severely even of him? Had she not herself been a hypocrite all these years? She shrank from the word; she trembled under her horror of it, yet felt its truth. Had she not been for half her lifetime a member of the church? Was not her name at this moment on the church-roll in the old home? yet for months and years it had been only a name.

"It was not enough that I should be deceived in everybody else," her soul cried out within her, "but I must even be deceived in myself. I have no belief in a God who pities and loves and directs, else I should have found comfort and joy in serving him." Not even when Ailee died were her tears as bitter as they were that night over the revelation of her unlovely self. The night drew on, and still this poor self-accusing spirit sat and gazed at her wasted past. She used that word "wasted" about it after a while. She admitted to herself that many, perhaps most of her sorrows which had in them an element of bitterness, were the outgrowth of her own proud and self-sufficient spirit. Gradually there came to her, like a whisper from some other country, a

realization that she was thinking about the past, and that there was a present and a future. She was young yet ; it was mere sentiment to talk about a wasted life. A good deal of it had been wasted. Search where she would she could not find anything entirely satisfactory in its story. Her love for Ailee had been fierce and exacting ; its spirit would certainly have hurt the little girl, had she been left to infuse it into hers. Even her love for Lilian was growing selfish. She knew that she had grudged the father those five o'clock hours in which he had had the child all to himself. She knew she had thought almost with horror of that second mother who would come, sometime, and rob her of her darling. So there was really no use in trying to secure comfort out of the past ; but the future, could she not make it utterly different ? Then she did that best thing, perhaps, for a soul wrought upon as hers had been, turned away from self entirely, and began to think of others. When she stood downstairs appalled before that awful weight of pain, and powerless to say a word of comfort, there had come to her the feeling, so strong that she had almost put it into words, that the man needed God ; human help was vain for any such sorrow. He needed such a God as her mother used to worship, and as her brother Hervey knew and loved. Even more than he, did the poor wretched wife need God. She was dying ; she had come almost to the verge

of life that night; she would come closer to it some day, soon. It needed no physician to tell that the end was near. "And I must help her," said Rebecca, speaking the words out plainly on the still night air. "I must tell her what God can be to a soul; what I know he can be. Did I not know my mother?" The thought quieted her — illumined her mind, as it were, with other thoughts. She would change utterly her way of life; she would not think about herself, or her happiness, or trials any more; she would live for other people. She would serve God with her whole heart; she knew him and believed him; she could point him out to others, and she would. Because she had no happiness in his service, it did not follow that others would not have; nor did it follow that she was released from the obligations of service. "If I did not love my father," she told herself, "I would still be bound to honor him."

And then she winced as she remembered how far short she had come of the honor due. It was not strange, she assured herself, that she had no love for the service of God; she had dishonored him, held aloof from him, acted a lie in his presence, called herself by his name, and refused him the ordinary outward service of even respect. How could he do other than turn coldly away from her recent efforts to find him? He was not bound now to reveal himself to her as a God of love; but she would give herself to him all the same; and

having been well taught she knew he would not despise the offering.

"I have not been sincere," she told herself. "I have been looking for comfort, for happiness, not for service. I do not believe, now that I come to think of it, that I ever had the right feeling even for a little while. I joined the church because the others were going to — because Fred did, and it was the right thing to do — not because I had given myself to Christ to do as he told me, whatever happened. Now I will begin again. There are those in this house who need him, and they do not know him. I can speak of what he was to mother, to my brother in Heaven, even to little Ailee. I can speak of what he would have been to me, if I had let him. I am going to do it. I will give myself to him now and from this time forth for service. I am his to obey, whether he ever gives me any joy in his service or not. I do not expect joy; I have wasted that part of my life." By which you will see how little she knew about God. But she went on her knees and spoke aloud and solemnly the word of consecration:

"God in Christ, I ask thee to forgive the past, and to take me as I am; a sinner like unto few, for I have sinned against much light. Yet I dare to come and give myself to thee, fully and forever; and I know that thou wilt accept me. Now I am a soldier, ready for service. Use me as thou wilt. Amen."

CHAPTER XV.

THE TRUTH.

DO any who are acquainted with God need to be told that, following the prayer of entire surrender there came into this tossed and worried heart, a sense of that "peace which passeth understanding?"

It always seems to me especially well that inspiration formed for us the phrase with which to describe, as much as we may, that sudden positive change which comes into the heart when the Holy Spirit takes possession. I do not wonder that skeptics sneer, and honest doubters look troubled and doubtful when an attempt is made to explain this mystery. For we have His word that "the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness unto him, and he cannot know them, because they are spiritually judged." Afterwards, it struck Rebecca as a wonderful thing that *she* who had been in search of happiness all her life, and had

had it elude her, just when she gave up the idea of rest, and consecrated herself fully to service, should have such a sense of peace flow in upon her as she had never imagined could be felt. At the time, she did not even recognize it.

"I am actually too tired," she said, when she arose from her knees, "to think any more. I believe I could go to sleep; and when I came into the room it did not seem to me that I could ever sleep again."

In ten minutes thereafter she was asleep. Thus quietly, without manifestation that human beings recognize, had the mighty Spirit of God taken full possession of a soul. Whether Rebecca Meredith had never before felt His power, whether the experience of her girlhood had been only emotional, I will not undertake to say. One thing is certain, she had never of deliberate choice surrendered her will utterly into His keeping until this night. She may have had heretofore what has been described as "religion enough to make one miserable," but the joy of service was certainly to be hers for the first time. And so new was the sense of peace in her heart that she named it weariness, and expected to take up the old unrest with the coming morning.

After that, nothing anywhere was quite as it had been before. For a time Rebecca thought that it was everybody else who had changed. Nancy, for instance, was much less disagreeable

than usual. It might have been because she had the face ache and a "misery in her bones." Rebecca noticed the heavy eyes and flushed cheeks when she met her in the hall.

"You have taken cold," she said, after Nancy had, in an astonished sort of way, answered her kindly put questions. "Have you finished all the rooms but mine? Then go up to your room and lie down, and I will attend to my own work. Miss Lilian is with her father, so I shall have time. And I will fill the hot-water bag for your face-ache; you will find it very soothing."

"Bless and save us!" ejaculated Nancy, even before Rebecca was out of hearing. "What has come over her? She do have a heart and feelings for somebody besides Miss Lilian, I believe."

It is to be feared that the peculiar ejaculation with which Nancy began, was as near an approach to prayer as she ever made. Rebecca, overhearing the sentence, thought of this, while she blushed in remembrance of the impression her life must have made, when so small an act of kindness could so overwhelm Nancy. She told herself that the girl was good-hearted, and well-meaning; perhaps she even did as well as she knew how. What a wonderful difference it would have made with her own life, if the same could have been said of her.

Mrs. Payne noticed the change. "I thought you would be all tuckered out this morning," she said, when they met in the hall; "and here you

are as bright as the day. I must say I'm not. My nerves got such a shaking up last night, that I won't get over it in a week. You can't take care of a body for years, just as if she were a child — worse than a child, for that matter — and not grow fond of her, even though you feel sometimes as though you would like to shake her. She was terribly weak all night, and she is just like a rag this morning ; and for that matter, so am I. I never slept a wink — I didn't dare ; and I couldn't, somehow, if I had dared."

What a hard life Mrs. Payne's had been. Rebecca remembered pitifully that sentence : "If I had been a praying woman." It had never before seemed so important to her that women should know how to pray. In the course of the day, Mrs. Barnett confided to Rogers the belief that Rebecca had had "something come over her ; she was less cranky-like, and acted more as if there were other folks in the world." Although every word which had passed between the two, had been when they met for a moment at the foot of the stairs, Mrs. Barnett with a large basket of freshly-ironed clothes on her arm. Rebecca had said, "Let me carry that up for you, Mrs. Barnett. I am younger than you ; and you look tired."

So small an act that it ought to have made her blush to think that it should surprise any one to have her offer it ; yet Mrs. Barnett was surprised, and showed it — making Rebecca realize again



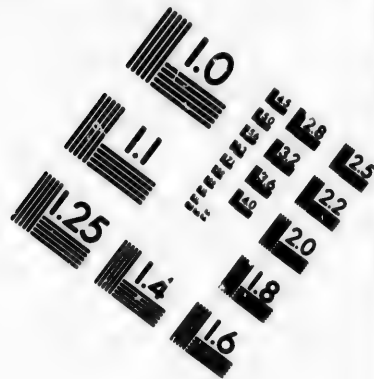
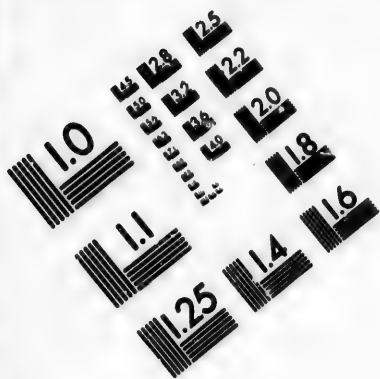
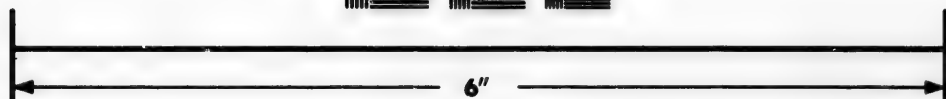
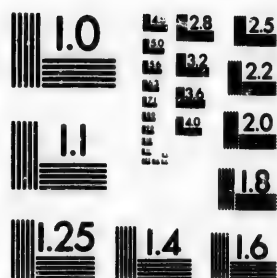


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that she had been selfish at every point. Having deliberately resolved to live for others, she was discovering that there were constant little opportunities for doing so. There were other quiet ways in which the difference between Rebecca of to-day, and the one who was there yesterday was emphasized. She wrote to Hervey that evening, a long, cheery letter — almost like the ones she used to write, when he first went to India. She did better than that; she began a letter to her father; "Dear father" — wrote five lines, stopped, held her pen in uncertainty for several minutes, then tore the sheet in two, and began again.

"Dear father and mother:" she brushed away the tears as she wrote that last name, but she said to her newly awakened heart, "Why not? Father will like it, and it harms no one. She fills the position of mother in my father's house, and I suppose I should like it myself, if I were in her place, which I never would be. Then she continued her letter; a pleasant, homelike one, such as had not reached the old home since she went away. There were certainly radical changes in Rebecca Meredith; though they were all so small as to be hardly worthy of notice, unless one were watching one's self at the dangerous points. Truth to tell, Rebecca was somewhat astonished over them.

"I never knew I was a selfish woman," she said to herself, "but I must have been all my life,

else these little commonplaces would not require thought and actual effort, on my part." Yet she was not selfish in great things, nor in anything where those she dearly loved were concerned. It was only that the people she loved were very few, and she had not cared to interest herself in any others. Outwardly, life went on very much as before. The Tuesday lunches were continued, Lilian being on good behavior, and her father appearing in every respect as usual. Looking at his cold, grave face, Rebecca found herself sometimes wondering if the scene in the library were not all a dream. But the vivid experiences through which she herself had passed were certainly no dream.

Perhaps the most marked evidence of the change in her life, as regarded others, was found in Mrs. McKenzie's room. For several days after that lady's alarming attack, Rebecca saw nothing of her. Then, one morning she was sent for, and found Mrs. McKenzie dressed in the most becoming of morning robes, seated in her easy-chair by the window, and looking much as usual; save that the dark lines under her eyes were more pronounced, and the eyes themselves were dull.

"How long it is since I have seen you," she said, extending her hand. "They think I have been too ill for company, but a look at you would have refreshed me. How well you look; better even than usual. What a comfort it must be to

feel strong, and ready for life. I suppose I frightened you by my ill turn? Mrs. Payne said you were with me when it came on. I was worse than usual, they say. Poor child! it was hard on you to have me get sick while nurse was away."

"It was wrong in me to help you to the drops which made you ill," Rebecca replied, with quiet firmness. She had carefully considered what she should say if she had opportunity, and so spoke without hesitation.

Mrs. McKenzie laughed lightly, although at the same time she regarded her with a keen, questioning gaze.

"Do you lay all the trouble to the poor drops?" she said. "I assure you they were innocent enough; I did not take them in time to ward off the headache which is liable to precede one of these attacks; but you were not to blame for that, so do not let any of the blame fall on your shoulders."

"Mrs. McKenzie," said Rebecca, looking the frail lady fully in the face, "I know what the drops were, and I know the effect they had upon you; and you and I both know that they ought not to have been taken."

"Really!" said Mrs. McKenzie, looking at her attendant with a sort of wonder. "Can this be Rebecca? One might almost suppose you to be a daughter of Mrs. Payne; I think you are forgetting yourself."

"No, ma'am; I mean to be perfectly respectful; but I mean to speak the truth."

"Whether you know anything about the subject or not? What do you in your wisdom suppose the drops to have been?"

"I know that the bottle contained laudanum; and I know that it is opium in some form which is killing you. Dear Mrs. McKenzie, forgive me; I am not saying it to hurt you, but indeed you were very near to death, and I know that you cannot long bear such a strain."

"It is false!" said the invalid, sitting erect, with her eyes glaring like a maniac's. "I never touch a drop of opium in any form. Who has told you such horrid tales? If it was Mrs. Payne she shall go to-day, and you shall follow her."

"It was not Mrs. Payne who told me, madam, and you are not saying what you mean. It is of no use to speak in this way to me. I am only too sure of what I am saying; and I am speaking from my very soul to you, not because I want to hurt, but to help you."

"Who has told you to get off such an extraordinary statement to me? If this is some of Deane's work I shall never forgive him. You do not dare to tell me that you are not acting under orders."

"No," said Rebecca, "I will not tell you that; I am acting under orders. I promised the Lord Jesus Christ on my knees, this morning, that I would be true to him and to you. I have not been

true to him in the past. I have been silent about him when I knew you sorely needed his help; but he has forgiven me, and I am pledged to him. O, dear Mrs. McKenzie! let him save you."

She was unprepared for the effect of this appeal. The wild look went out of the sick woman's eyes, and dropping her face in her hands she burst into a passion of tears. But the words which she sobbed out with the tears were not such as Rebecca had hoped to hear. Instead of a cry for help to the only One who could help her, they were a passionate wail to the effect that she had no friend in the world; everybody had turned against her, and believed evil things of her. First Deane had been prejudiced, and had torn her children from her, then Mrs. Payne had come there to watch her like a spy, and now Rebecca, on whom she had hoped to lean, had turned from her and believed what her enemies said against her. It was all too terrible; she wished she could die; she had nothing to live for, and did not want to live. She wished the drops had been laudanum, and she had taken enough of them to kill her.

Through it all Rebecca knelt, pale and quiet, by the lady's chair, where she had dropped when she made her earnest appeal; she was bitterly disappointed. All the morning, since receiving Mrs. McKenzie's message to come to her as soon as Lilian was asleep, her thoughts had been one perpetual prayer for guidance, the longing to save

this poor victim from herself having increased as the hours passed. Yet apparently she had succeeded only in calling from her false and reckless words.

She did not realize it, but all the time the sick woman was watching with much of the cunning which belongs to insanity, for the effect of her words. When she went into such a passion of self-pity as this before Mrs. Payne that poor woman's heart was wrung, and she hastened to kiss and cry over her patient, and call her a poor abused lamb, and assure her that nobody should trouble her any more. For at such times it was not possible for Mrs. Payne to believe that her lady was other than insane, and insane people ought to be soothed and humored. As for Mr. McKenzie, when she resorted to like scenes with him he had of late years cut them short by abruptly leaving the room, and summoning the nurse to the rescue. She looked to see one of these effects upon Rebecca. That the girl still knelt, grave and unmoved, was a disappointment. But Rebecca had found a stronghold so new and so safe that she could not come out of it now. She was taking this utterly bewildering and disheartening woman to God, and asking his special help just then.

As suddenly as before, Mrs. McKenzie's mood changed. She ceased weeping and bewailing, and after a moment spoke in a dry, hard voice. "It

is all true, Rebecca. Get up; you need not pray about me any more; it will do no good; I am past praying for; but I will tell the truth. It was laudanum, and I take it or its equivalent whenever I get a chance. I have to do it; I know it is killing me; I know I am a terrible woman, an unnatural mother, and unworthy the name of wife, but all the same I do it. I know there is no hope for me in this world or the next, but I go right on. 'Pray!' I have prayed for hours, and then have gotten up from my knees and gone straight for some of the stuff."

At this point Rebecca interrupted her, speaking eagerly, "O, dear madam! I know all about such prayer. That is not praying; it is just saying over words. I have prayed that way myself, and it is worse than useless. But there is a way; I have learned it; there is help for you. If you just mean to let Jesus help you he will do it. He will not force you; he must have your will on his side, but he stands ready to do all the part that you cannot. Dear Mrs. McKenzie, let him free you from this curse which is killing you and ruining your home. He is the only one who can do it; but he surely can."

"I don't know," said Mrs. McKenzie, looking at her almost with an air of curiosity — "I don't know why you are so different from yourself. I think I was attracted to you because you were so different from others; but now you are somebody

new. I would like to be somebody new myself. I have had dreams of it in the past — of surprising Deane some morning by coming downstairs and saying to him, 'Deane, you needn't tremble for me any more; I am not going to disgrace you again; I am made over.' But I shall never say it; there isn't enough of me to make over. 'Resolve!' I have made resolves enough to fill this room to the ceiling — to fill the world — and they did no good, any of them. I haven't any will left. I am weaker than the veriest baby, so far as intention is concerned. The only thing I can plan for is the stuff that is killing me. I don't see why they do not let me get enough of it sometime, and have done with it. What a relief it would be to have me gone."

She was trying to shock her again. Rebecca felt this instinctively, and would not be shocked. Her voice was never quieter than when she asked her next brief, clear-cut question: "Would it be a relief to you, Mrs. McKenzie? Are you not afraid to die and meet God?"

Then the poor woman went off into another outburst of tears and cries. This time Rebecca could not but believe that they voiced the thought of her heart. "Yes," she said, "I am, I am! I have ruined my husband and my home; I am a miserable woman, not fit to live, and afraid to die. O, God! what will become of me?"

CHAPTER XVI.

WAITING.

THAT was the way the interview had to end. The poor, weak frame, unused to self-control and unused to excitement, was overcome by the violence of her emotion, and Mrs. McKenzie was presently borne fainting to bed; Mrs. Payne bending over her with the solicitude which a mother feels for a helpless child, and between her anxious ministrations and soothing words, bestowing sundry suspicious glances on Rebecca, and broadly hinting that something injudicious must have been said or done, as the invalid felt unusually well when she left her; she added glumly, that something always did happen as sure as she left her for a few minutes. Goodness knew she wished she was made of rubber or leather or something, and didn't ever have to leave her.

"You see she is just like a child," explained Mrs. Payne half-apologetically, later in the day. "She hasn't got any strength of body or mind left,

and she has to be humored and petted. You can't say anything moral to her, and you needn't try"—this last with a severe look. "Goodness knows I've tried it, until I've pretty near killed her. He had a notion that her moral nature ought to be roused, and I did my best ; but I told him then that she hadn't any to rouse, and she hasn't ; she has just used it all up. The thing to be done with her is to take care of her day and night, just as you would a sick baby, and be patient with her, and keep her away from folks that sympathize with her so much, they are willing to help kill her. I dread the summer, I'm sure. There will be new servants to keep watch of, and other boarders ; and there is always some little wretch of a boy who is ready to do any kind of an errand, for a few pennies ; I'm always worn entirely out by the time the summer is over. Are you going into the country with us ? I hope to goodness that you are. You don't know what a mercy it is to have somebody to speak to who understands."

Rebecca could only respond that she did not know ; there had been no plans made for the summer. She was heavy-hearted ; she had hoped so much from her effort, and had seemed to fail so utterly. Perhaps she would have no other opportunity to help this woman, whose burden seemed to have been laid on her own soul. For among Mrs. Payne's other disheartening sentences

had been one hinting that her patient was in the habit of having strong aversions for certain people who had undertaken to "rouse her moral nature," and refusing to see them again. What if this should be her experience? And then she remembered, with a thrill of infinite relief, that she had nothing to do with the result of her effort, save to take it to Him who had directed her to make it. Such relief did this girl find in her Refuge that she wondered how it had been possible for her to have lived all these years, practically without prayer. Do you wonder at the change which had suddenly come to her? If you do, you belong to those to whom it is impossible to explain the phenomena of prayer. It does not take the Lord a long time to secure full possession of a soul which has been surrendered to him; but the effect which communion with him will have upon such a soul can only be understood by those who try it for themselves. In a very short time, it became evident that no such result as Mrs. Payne had hinted at, was to follow the honest effort to speak the truth. So far from taking an aversion to Rebecca, Mrs. McKenzie asked for her almost constantly; would have been glad, indeed, to have kept her with her, and allowed herself to be guided by her wishes, in a way that bewildered Mrs. Payne. Not a great deal of time could be given to her, of course, for Lilian needed her nurse's care, and neither child nor nurse were

disposed to give up their rights in this respect ; nor did the master of the house approve.

"I am very grateful for your kindness to Mrs. McKenzie," he said, in his gravest, most business-like tone, "and I am glad that she finds a pleasure in your attendance. Whatever of your leisure you choose to give to her will not be forgotten, I assure you ; but of course Lilian is your first care, and I am glad to feel sure that you will not neglect her for any other interest."

And now the days were more than full ; for Rebecca could not but be sure at last that she was wanted in a peculiar sense by the half-insane woman who clung to her. She planned to give her every moment of waking time which was honestly her own, and strove by every means in her power to awaken the dormant conscience into life. It is true she could not feel that she was making much headway ; the almost daily arguments which she held with the weak woman were mere repetitions of one another ; but one thing had certainly been gained ; Mrs. McKenzie was beginning to understand that she must speak the truth with this new attendant. Mrs. Payne, who was well acquainted with the peculiar influence on the moral nature of the drug which her patient took, had long ago ceased to expect the truth, and received the most unreasonable and contradictory statements with a good-humored semblance of belief. Mr. McKenzie, on the contrary, had been so

repulsed by this phase of the disease that he was in the habit of cutting short the calls which he punctiliously made at stated intervals, and leaving her abruptly as soon as her lapses from fact became apparent. Rebecca did neither of these things; she looked the invalid calmly in the eye, and said quietly — quite as if she were making a most commonplace statement — "Mrs. McKenzie, that is not true. Nothing is gained by telling me what we both know is false."

Mrs. McKenzie looked at her curiously one evening when she had said something of the kind, and after a moment's silence replied, with a slight laugh, "You are a very queer girl. How is it that you dare to say such things to me? Even Deane doesn't. Still, I rather like it; you are in earnest. But are you sure you are right? What is truth? Are not statements which are partially false more near the truth, after all, than that which passes for truth? I wonder why I do not speak exact truth? I seem to dislike it, sometimes, just because it is truth. I actually take some pains to invent falsehood, even when the truth might serve me better. What do you suppose is the matter with me?"

"Sin," said Rebecca, with quiet voice and steady eyes.

"'Sin!' What a horrid word. Even Dr. Carter did not use it the last time I let him preach to me. He said that I was the victim of a diseased

mind. When the mind is diseased how can one help what one does? How is it that you dare to call it 'sin,' as though I were to blame? Are you under orders to say such things to me?"

"Yes, dear madam, always under orders. You have a moral disease, called sin; and the only physician who can cure you has sent me to tell you the absolute truth."

Sometimes from these talks she would lapse into the self-debased state; calling herself harder names than any Rebecca would ever have used, and weeping bitterly, until she exhausted herself, and Mrs. Payne would have to be summoned. Sometimes instead, she would grow angry and order the girl from her sight; but in either case Rebecca would invariably be sent for before many hours.

In these ways the weeks passed, and the early summer was upon them. Preparations were making for departure to a quiet summer home in the country, and Mrs. Payne was shaking her head ominously and dreading the change, whenever she had opportunity for a quiet word with Rebecca.

"She will be a great deal worse, you see if she won't. She always manages to get hold of more of it in the country, than at any other time. I wish we could just stay in town; I don't believe the heat would kill her. You and Lilian might go to the country, and Mr. McKenzie could run down once a week, and leave us here to fight it

out. She won't hear to such a course — that is the reason it is never tried — and Dr. Caruthers says she would run down, he is afraid ; and we must just redouble our vigilance while she is in the country. I'd like to know how we are going to do it, unless we tie her up in her room and let her see nobody but our two selves. It is my belief even then that she would get hold of the stuff somehow ; she does here, you know, in spite of us, every once in awhile. The sharpness of the woman is something wonderful."

Mrs. Payne was so relieved to have the silence of years taken from her, that Rebecca was in a fair way to hear in detail, all the sorrows and perplexities of these years. It had been decided, without many words, that Rebecca was to go to the country with them. Mr. McKenzie had sent for her one evening, to have a business interview, but something had evidently moved him from his usual calm, for all he said was :

"You understand that we are to go to the country next week ? Rebecca, I know you will not desert my little Lilian and her poor mother. Am I not right ?" And Rebecca, the tears starting in her eyes from sympathy with the burdened man, murmured that she would be glad to stay if she was wanted, and made haste from the room.

But the bustle of preparation for removal was interrupted. Lilian, who had retired at seven in apparent health, awakened at midnight so ill that

Rebecca promptly summoned first the housekeeper and then the father. Before the next day's sun had fairly risen, Nancy had informed every member of the anxious household that she "guessed Miss Lillian was awful sick; that Dr. Caruthers shook his head and looked scared and anxious when she asked about her, and she heard him, with her own ears, tell Mrs. Barnett that he was afraid Lillian was going to have the fever, for it was in this neighborhood; and he was afraid it would go hard with her, for the child had no consideration."

Rebecca, who overheard this statement, was too heavy-hearted to laugh at the mistake; for she knew that Nancy meant "constitution," and that it was too sadly true. How could the child of such a mother be expected to have a constitution to resist disease?

Those sweet June days which followed one another in long-drawn-out beauty! For years afterwards Rebecca could not smell the breath of June roses, and feel the glory of the perfect June weather, without a little shiver of recollection. Mercifully, the intense heat which often visited the city early in June was spared them, and if anybody had had heart to analyze the weather, it would have been found simply perfect. But hearts and hands were full. The fever burned and burned with such fierceness that it seemed as though it must burn away the little life. If there had been

any doubt before, it was now made very apparent that Rebecca Meredith was "wanted" in the sense of being needed in this house. Lilian clung to her with almost frantic insistence, and in her delirium turned at times even from her father, to throw herself into the arms of her nurse. Day after day and night after night the strain went on, Rebecca leaving her charge only for the few moments which necessity required, and being often even then summoned from the cup of tea she was hastily swallowing, with the word that Lilian was screaming for her. Night after night the poor father hung over his darling in silent agony, doing what he could, and when he could, and when the child demanded Rebecca, yielding his place to her with a meekness that went to her woman's heart. None of those most closely concerned questioned the doctor. There was no need; he was a friend as well as physician, and his face told the story of his fears. To Nancy, whose anxieties became so great that she conquered her fear even of the stern doctor, he said briefly, "It is impossible to tell what the result will be. Certainly she is very ill; nothing is ever gained by denying facts; but people have been very ill before, and have recovered. See to it that you do your part, my girl." And Nancy understood him well enough to cry her eyes and nose very red; but she tried faithfully to follow his advice, until Rebecca learned to call for her when she wanted something within

the limit of her capacity done swiftly and well. She even remembered one day to commend her, and took a moment's time to wonder over the sudden light which illumined the girl's face, and to query whether it could be that she had never been commended before.

Very little attention did business receive at the hands of Mr. McKenzie during these weeks of watching. A half-hour twice a day spent in the library in conference with his partner was the utmost that the outside world secured from him. Then he went regularly twice a day to Mrs. McKenzie's room; for the rest, he was either at Lilian's bedside, or waiting in the next room for a call thither. A wonderful helper did Rebecca find him. Sometimes Lilian seemed to know him; then he was invaluable; no arms could rest her like his, and no hand but his could give medicine or nourishment. He lived for those intervals of recognition. But for the most part the burden of nursing fell heavily upon Rebecca. There was a trained nurse in attendance, but she was simply useful in advising, and in watching for changes, Lilian seeming from the very first to consider her an interloper, with whom she meant to have nothing to do. Occasionally somebody said that Rebecca was overdoing. Once the doctor looked sharply at her and said, "You must get some rest to-day and a few minutes in the outside air."

Then Mr. McKenzie had turned anxious eyes

on her and said, "Yes, do try to get a little rest. If you should break down what would become of her?"

But Rebecca had answered quietly, even putting a brave smile on her face, that she should not break down; she rested quite often in her chair; they were not to worry about her. In her heart she meant that she would not break down until there was no further need for her watchfulness; for poor Rebecca had given up all hope of the little life. Had not Ailee died? and Ailee was a stronger child than Lilian, and had inherited a good constitution.

There came at last a terrible day when the cries of delirium were hushed, and the cheeks which had so long been crimson were deathly in their pallor, and the heavy sleep into which the little sufferer fell was so like death that those who watched knew, without trying to read the physician's impassive face, that the awful crisis of the disease was upon them. The day itself was breathless—the first very warm day of the season. The sun seemed fierce and pitiless, and it seemed as though he stood still in the heavens and let the hours of almost an eternity roll on without another night. So terrible was it to sit by that still sleeper and feel that there was nothing to be done but wait, and to know almost to a certainty for what they were waiting.

On this day, when Mr. McKenzie was informed

that his business partner was waiting to see him, he shook his head. "Tell him to do whatever he thinks wise about everything," he said; "I cannot talk with him to-day."

So the man went away with grave, troubled face, and people outside knew that Mr. McKenzie had very little hope of his daughter.

Mrs. Payne, whose patient had had an ill-turn just before Lilian sickened, and who had seen but little of the child, stole in during the day, and stood watching her for a few minutes, then went softly out, the tears rolling down her cheeks; and they knew that Mrs. Payne felt that she had said good-by to Lilian.

Into the midst of this solemn waiting, which was so much harder to bear than activity, came a break. There was a sudden confusion outside. Doors opened and closed less noiselessly than they had been doing, and once some one called in a quick, sharp tone. Then a summons came for Mr. McKenzie. It was not business this time, for in response to the hurriedly whispered message he went at once. The trained nurse looked her inquiries, but Rebecca shook her head. There was nothing that she could tell, but in her heart she knew what had occurred.

CHAPTER XVII.

LIFE AND DEATH.

IT was even as she had feared. Mr. McKenzie was hours away, and the doctor only looked in hurriedly at intervals to note if there had been any change in Lilian. Presently the trained nurse who went in search of news, came back with the whispered word that "that poor mother had been taken worse, and, from all accounts, they thought she was dying. Poor creature! she would see her baby very soon, after all, perhaps. Wasn't it sad?"

Rebecca could only bow her head for reply; she had no words to speak. Then, with her face buried on her hands, her soul went up in prayer as it had never been her privilege to pray before. Not so much for the little life beside her which she felt was ebbing away; not even so much for the dying woman—if she were dying—as for the stricken husband and father whose burden it seemed to her must be almost greater than he

could bear. No; the mother did *not* die. It was the trained nurse again who brought news at last.

"They say she is better; it seems she is used to such awful spells — that Nancy says so; but she says they thought she was going sure, this time."

The doctor's face was as impassive as ever when at last he came to make a longer stay beside Lilian. His replies to the nurse were very brief. "She is better." Was she out of danger? "I think so." And to the nurse's ejaculation, "What a mercy it is that she is spared to that poor man just now!" he made no sort of reply. When Mr. McKenzie came back it seemed as though years had been added to his life. Rebecca even fancied that his limbs trembled as he crossed the room. And the look on his face she could never quite forget. They were alone for the moment; the doctor had just departed, assuring Rebecca that he did not anticipate any change for several hours, and the nurse had slipped away for what she called a "bite," having vainly urged Rebecca to go in her stead.

The father had gone to the other side of the bed and dropped upon his knees beside Lilian — an attitude he often took, the better to observe her slightest movement.

"Mr. McKenzie, you need God." The words seemed to be wrung from Rebecca almost against her will. She had not planned to say them; she

had thought to be entirely silent. He did not seem to be surprised at her words, nor annoyed.

"Yes," he said, in a slow, tremulous tone very unlike his own, "I need — something. I must have help of some sort or I shall die. My burden is heavier than I can bear."

In an instant Rebecca was on her knees by the bedside, praying in an audible voice; a thing she had never done before. Praying, not for the little child lying there so quiet, breathing her life away, but for the father: that the Infinite Father would come down to him and reveal himself as a burden-bearer — one able and willing to enfold him; praying that he might even then and there see Jesus Christ as his friend and Saviour. She did not know what words she used; she was never able to recall them — at the time she did not think of words. She had so recently learned what real prayer meant, that she could well understand how little the kneeling man knew about it; it mattered not what he thought, if only she could help to show him the mighty Christ. The prayer was very short; her feeling was too intense for many words. In a few minutes she had slipped back to her seat again. When Dr. Caruthers returned he found her as he had left her, and the father kneeling where he had spent so much of his time of late; but now his eyes instead of being fixed on Lillian's face were hidden in the bedclothes. The doctor went around to him, laid a friendly hand

on his shoulder and spoke low : " Mr. McKenzie, there will be no change here for some time ; could you not be persuaded to try to get a little rest ? You have my word for it that you shall be called the moment there is the slightest indication of change." Then, for the first time in more than an hour, the father lifted his head. His face was still very pale, but the terrible look it had worn was gone.

" I will try," he said to the doctor, then coming over to Rebecca's side of the bed, he bent over Lilian, looking long at the white face and sunken eyes. As he turned away his eyes rested for a single moment on Rebecca, and he said in low grave tones : " I thank you." Did it mean for her faithful care of Lilian ?

After that Dr. Caruthers tried his skill upon Rebecca. He represented to her that at present there was nothing to be done but wait, and the trained nurse could surely accomplish that ; by and by there would be a change, and it was barely possible that it might be such an one as would demand all her strength ; for if Lilian should awaken conscious, it was reasonable to suppose that she would at once want her nurse. Would not Rebecca show the good sense which had characterized her during this ordeal, and rest when she could ? He would make the same promise to her that he had to Mr. McKenzie.

So Rebecca, feeling sure that she could not

sleep, nor even rest, yet realized that it was the part of common sense to try, and went away ; and in ten minutes from that time was in the soundest sleep of her life. Overtaxed nature had borne all that it could. Four hours afterwards she awakened bewildered, even frightened, at finding herself away from her charge, and in a perfectly quiet house. Very rapidly she made the necessary changes of dress, and hurried into the hall, afraid to hear any news, and yet feeling that she must know at once all that there was to know.

She met Dr. Caruthers striding down the hall. "Ah!" he said, "I was coming for you, according to promise ; I hope you are rested, for there is work. She is awake and conscious, and I believe if her nurse can be trusted to control herself and do exactly as she is told, she will pull her through."

He must have understood his subject. Weak from long watching, feeling it even more just now because of the heavy sleep, Rebecca's brain reeled with the news, and she clutched at the baluster to save herself from falling. It was just then that he said, "If her nurse can be trusted to control herself," and the nurse brought all her powers of self-control into action. One moment the room was black before her, and she felt herself going up to the ceiling, the next she had steadied herself and looked up at Dr. Caruthers with a smile.

"I think I was not prepared for good news," she said, "but I am all right now."

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"That was well done," he answered, watching her closely. "Go down to the dining-room and drink a cup of the broth you will find there, and eat anything you can induce yourself to take; then go to the piazza on the north side, and walk up and down it ten times; after that you may come to Lilian. There is a long and dangerous stretch of road before us, and we must be as wise as serpents."

Rebecca turned without a word and went to the dining-room. She had believed that she could not eat; but the doctor was to be obeyed. After that, for three perilous weeks Rebecca was at her post, watching clear-eyed and quiet every passing waking movement of her patient, and ministering to her as none other could. When Lilian slept, she, still under the doctor's orders, slept also; she ate what and when he told her to, and walked on the north, or south piazza as he directed, and gave herself to the business of nursing Lilian, and keeping herself in strength to do it.

"That is rather a remarkable nurse of yours," Dr. Caruthers said to the father one morning. It was after Lilian was so far recovered that she was on the north piazza with her nurse at that moment, in a hammock, surrounded by pillows, and pale as a lily, but smiling and content. The doctor had assisted in establishing them—Lilian in the hammock and Rebecca in a low rocker at her side. Then he had gone to the library to say a parting

word to Mr. McKenzie, and had begun it as I have indicated. "She has common sense in the management of her patient, and of herself; and common sense, paradoxical as it may seem, is the most uncommon thing there is in this world." Mr. McKenzie smiled. "Humanly speaking," continued the doctor, "you owe your child's life to her."

"Yes," said Mr. McKenzie again, and he said not another word. Dr. Caruthers went away saying to himself that except where Lilian was concerned, that man was immovable.

It was a very slow getting well; the stifling days of summer were upon them, but the child was not yet strong enough for the fatigue of a journey, and Mrs. McKenzie was so bitterly opposed to leaving home without the child, that the doctor advised her waiting. Carroll, who, Rebecca learned afterwards, had been summoned home at the time when there was almost no hope for Lilian, but had been too ill to come, was awaiting them at the seaside, being peremptorily forbidden by his physician to brave the city's heat, even for a single day. When she heard this, Rebecca understood why Mr. McKenzie was willing to heed his wife's appeals that she should wait for Lilian. There were reasons why it would be unsafe for Carroll and his mother to be together, without the father to stand guard. So they waited, and Lilian grew daily stronger. The morning

that the Tuesday lunch was resumed, or at least the first time that Lilian came to the dining-room, her father brought her a mass of wild flowers which he had discovered that morning fresh from the country. Their own conservatory was aglow with flowers, and the child who loved them dearly had fresh ones every day; but no choice exotics had ever pleased her like these hardy treasures of the woods. In his hand he held a bunch of small sweet-scented violets, and these he presently laid on Rebecca's plate, saying simply, "I hope every breath will tell you the story of my gratitude." It was his first and only attempt at thanking her for her devotion to his child.

It was just when they were beginning to say that by next week Lilian would be strong enough for the journey, that a new element of trouble came, or rather a trouble which was steadily gaining on them, but which they had not seen, came to the front. It was Dr. Caruthers who opened their eyes to it.

"Leave Lilian to Nancy for five minutes, Rebecca, and come to me in the dining-room while I give you some specific directions that I want carried out."

Rebecca obeyed unhesitatingly. It was generally understood now in the household that she was responsible for the carrying out of every order pertaining to Lilian. He commenced abruptly:

"Have you seen Mrs. McKenzie of late?"

"O, yes! for a few minutes every day."

"Do you note a change in her?"

"For the better — yes, sir," said Rebecca, with brightening eyes.

"In some respects, yes; in all respects, perhaps, under the circumstances, though it is not common to say so. What I mean is, do you know that she is very near the end?"

"Yes," he continued, answering Rebecca's startled look; "I am confident now that it can be but a few days. I had hoped to get her to the seaside and let the family be together; but it cannot be done. I tell you first, that you may understand all the circumstances, and be ready to help us. The boy is ill; I do not tell his father how ill he is, because I think the man has burdens enough already. The boy will recover, but it is a low fever such as they have been having in the institution where he was, and while he is doing very well, and receiving all possible care, it is not possible for him, now, to see his mother again. This will make it hard. She seems to depend on you more than on any others, and you need to know these things in order to help her. You are having a strange experience with this family, are you not? I do not know what they would do without you."

A strange experience indeed. It was weeks since Rebecca had had any question as to whether she was wanted; her work was plain enough, and

seemed to be hourly growing on her hands. Since Lilian had been well enough for her to leave in Nancy's care while she slept, Rebecca had been in the habit of spending an hour each day with Mrs. McKenzie. She knew that she was watched for eagerly, and she succeeded in making that hour the pleasantest of any in the day, save the one which Lilian and her father spent there. Moreover, Rebecca had believed that a great blessing was coming to this strangely distorted family, and coming through her instrumentality. On the first visit she had made after Lilian's illness, Mrs. McKenzie, looking frightfully ill herself, had drawn the girl's face down to her and whispered :

"I have given it up! I have not touched a drop of it in any form since that night, and I never will again. I have promised the Lord that I will not. I told him if he would spare my baby to her father I would never break my promise again. Deane doesn't trust me, I think. I have promised so often it is not strange that he should not; but this is different. Rebecca, the Lord does help; I told you I didn't believe it, but I do. It isn't because I have not had opportunities; there have been chances—for that matter I have some of it in my room this minute, but I will not touch it."

Nor had she. Rebecca had watched each day, and each day had commended the child-woman, and assured her of sympathy, and told her how glad Mr. McKenzie would be when he came to

realize it as a fact, and told her that now Lillian need never know anything about the past. And every day she had sought to lead the poor woman to a closer hold upon the infinite Helper, and had felt that she was succeeding.

It was only the night before that she had said to herself exultingly as she had gone from Mrs. McKenzie's side, "Saved, saved!" Then she had let herself try to imagine what it would be for husband and wife to come together feeling that the awful gulf which had separated them was closed, and that life stretched itself out before them in sunny lines. So absorbed had she been in this part of her work, that she had not noticed the steady decline in strength. Since she had come to understand the dark secret of the home, she had accused the drug of being the cause of all the trouble, and with it banished her fears had been forgotten. The doctor's news came to her like a blow. The woman over whom she had exulted was saved, but for Heaven, not for earth.

The doctor stood waiting the result of his news. "I see I have startled you," he said, after a moment. "I am surprised at that; I had given you credit for greater penetration; but you have been preoccupied. Well, how are we to manage? Is it your opinion that she ought to be told of her condition? Or shall we let her slip quietly away and make no more trouble? It will be a very quiet going, I think. Perhaps that is the better way."

"Oh! I cannot think so. Dr. Caruthers, would you not want to know if such a wonderful change as that were about to come to you?"

"Perhaps so," he said, after a moment's silence. "Well, will you undertake it?"

"I?" said Rebecca, and she drew back as one who shrank from the task.

"Why, yes; I had thought that it would better be you; she does not seem over fond of Dr. Carter, and there is no one else. Are you not one of the praying kind? It seems reasonable to associate prayer with dying; I hardly know why."

"I do," said Rebecca. She spoke quietly, and had already gained control of her shrinking nerves. "I will undertake it, doctor."

"Very well," he said, relieved. "I had a feeling that I could depend upon you. And what of him? I do not think he has an idea of such a change; she has been ill so long, and has had so many narrow escapes. Could you undertake to"—

But Rebecca interrupted him. She would take no more commissions; she was not at all the person to explain anything to Mr. McKenzie.

"All right," said the doctor, after he had considered her emphatic words for a moment, "I will hand him over to Carter; they seem to get on well together. Poor man! one could have the heartache for him if it would do any good."

Then he went away, with his heart much fuller of sympathy than some of his words would indicate.

CHAPTER XVIII.

RESPONSIBILITY.

REBECCA'S task proved not to be a formidable one. She went about it with utmost caution and tenderness, but with utter truthfulness.

"Do you mean that?" Mrs. McKenzie asked in an awed whisper, and she took in the sense of the softly murmured words of the girl who was kneeling beside her. Then, after a few minutes of utter silence she spoke quite steadily: "Well, perhaps it is better so. It is, of course, if God has planned it. I thought I would like to surprise Deane, and I thought I could do it, but perhaps he sees that I couldn't. I am not very strong even now, although I am different from what I have been for years. Yesterday I lay thinking what if I should go back! I was all in a tremble over it. I had just strength enough to get out the little bottle from where I had hidden it between the springs and the slats, and pour it out of that open window. I raised up all by myself

to do it, and I'm glad it is gone ; I feel safer so. Perhaps the grave is the only safe place for me."

Cold shivers like an ague chill shook Rebecca's frame as she listened. She had never before come into close contact with a person who was under the dominion of an awful habit, and the power of sin seemed more terrible to her than it ever had.

"You may well shudder," the sick woman said, but speaking herself in very quiet tones. "I had barely strength to do it, and the smell of it while it was gurgling out drove me wild. I tell you I am safer in the grave than anywhere else."

"O, dear Mrs. McKenzie! not in the grave."

"Well, no ; I will not say that. It used to be all that I could see ; but God has been very merciful. It seems strange that there should be Heaven for me ; but I think there is. And you will take care of my Lilian — such care as I have not given her. It is better so."

She said very little more, but lay quiet and grave ; evidently thinking over what had been told her. After a little, she raised herself and asked for Deane to be sent for. What passed between husband and wife that day only God knows.

After that she grew steadily weaker, failing so visibly that no one who saw her needed telling. One evening just as Lilian was asleep for the night, and Rebecca, who had had a busy day, was

seated by the hall window in a flood of moonlight, resting, Nancy came with hurrying feet, and wiping the tears from her face.

"O, Rebecca! I guess she's going, sure; and she wants you."

Without waiting for details, Rebecca sprang up hastily and hurried away. Mrs. McKenzie had been no worse than usual during the day, but she had not heard from her for several hours. Yes, there had been a change; she noted it the moment her eyes rested on the pallid face. Mr. McKenzie was holding in his, a hand which seemed already lifeless. Mrs. Payne was sobbing softly under cover of her apron, and the doctor stood motionless and grave, apparently waiting. He moved aside as Rebecca entered, and motioned her forward. The movement seemed to arouse the apparent sleeper on the bed; she opened her eyes and said softly, "Has she come?" Then, as Rebecca stepped close to her she smiled: "I wanted to ask you again—you will be sure to take care of my Lillian?"

"As long as she needs my care and I can give it, I will," said Rebecca in steady tones. And the smile on the sick woman's face deepened.

"I can trust you," she murmured. "Now, pray."

Rebecca glanced about her, startled. Was Dr. Carter there? Was any one who prayed? No; the direction must have been given to her. She

dropped upon her knees; she was unused to prayer before others. Save that one time in her dire extremity when she had prayed for Mr. McKenzie, his wife was the only one who had ever heard her, on her knees. But of course there was no thought of refusal, no time for hesitation. As for what she said, God knows; assuredly she does not; but she knows it was from her heart.

"Amen," said Mrs. McKenzie. Then, after a moment, "Kiss Lilian for mamma. O, Deane! you are sure you forgive me?"

His reply was murmured in her ear, and a tender smile was on her face the while. Then her eyes closed, and all was still. A few moments more, and Dr. Caruthers laid his hand on Mr. McKenzie's arm, spoke a few words in low tone, and led him away. Rebecca slipped back to her motherless charge, and kneeling beside her bed prayed for the poor boy who was waiting for the mother who would never come.

The next few days were almost bewildering in their responsibility. Every servant in the house seemed to understand by common consent that Rebecca was the one to be consulted in regard to anything which had to do with Lilian, or with plans for the immediate future. Perhaps Mr. McKenzie had so directed.

He came to her the morning after Mrs. McKenzie had left them, his first errand being to bring

Lilian back to her. The child had been with him in the library for more than an hour, and a glance at her little pale face showed Rebecca that she understood.

"This little girl is going to be very good," he said, with a faint, grave smile. "She means to take her food, and her medicine, and be brave all day for papa's sake."

And then Rebecca received the trembling form in her arms, and the golden head was hidden in her neck.

"I must leave her entirely in your care to-day," the father explained; "I must go to Carroll. I fear the poor boy is more ill than I had supposed, and I must in any case give him his mother's messages. I have left on my library table a paper giving directions, so far as I could recall what should be done; if other questions arise demanding immediate attention I beg you will use your judgment. I shall return early to-morrow morning."

Apparently Rebecca was to take charge of the paper; so she went for it, and quietly assumed the charge he had given her. It was well that she was by nature self-controlled and clear-headed. She needed all her strength and forethought. Even Mrs. Barnett leaned upon her.

"Do please give Norah a notion of what to have for dessert," she said, waylaying Rebecca in the hall as she was on her way downstairs. "There will be folks here to dinner, I suppose. He said

we must be ready for friends who might come, and I am that shaken up I don't half-know what I am about." She held a hand to her head while she spoke, and looked worn and ill. So Rebecca went to the kitchen and consulted with Norah.

There was scarcely less responsibility when the master of the house returned. By that time guests had arrived. Aunts and cousins belonging to the class who hold almost no intercourse with their relatives during their lives, but seem to feel the importance of gathering about their lifeless clay. Some of these cousins, near Rebecca's own age, looked wonderingly and somewhat doubtfully upon her. She overheard one of them interviewing the housekeeper.

"Barnett, who is that young woman who seems to have so much to say about things? One meets her everywhere, and she always has Lilian with her. Rather officious, is she not?"

The reply was very distinct. "That young woman is a dear friend of her that's gone; she had her sent for that last night, and said some of her last words to her; and Miss Lilian loves her dreadfully, and can't bear to be out of her sight. No, she ain't officious; she is that kind and considerate that I don't know what any of us would do without her."

Rebecca, busy and troubled as she was, could not restrain a smile; evidently Mrs. Barnett did not like the cousin who was questioning.

It was several days after the mother had been laid in the grave before Rebecca knew what was to become of Lilian and herself. Mr. McKenzie returned to his son directly after the funeral, saying nothing to her beyond the statement that he left Lilian absolutely in her care; but this he said positively, in the presence of the cousin who had considered her officious. So, though that cousin still lingered and did what she could to win Lilian, Rebecca kept her charge constantly in sight, and assumed all the responsibilities concerning her.

From Dr. Caruthers, who had gone down with Mr. McKenzie, she learned that the boy was slowly gaining; he had borne the news of his mother's death as well as could have been expected, but still it was a set back, and his father naturally felt very anxious. Mr. McKenzie went down to the shore where his son was, and returned, three times before he summoned Rebecca to a consultation. It was not a long one. His plans, he told her, were now matured so far as he could mature them without her help. His boy was in a critical condition. The terrible disappointment in regard to his mother had been very hard. The doctor believed that a sea voyage was a matter of vital importance to him, and a stay of some months in a totally different climate. He was unable to go without his father, or at least in his present condition there was no one with whom his father was willing to trust him, save himself. But Dr.

Caruthers, who was so sure that the sea was what the boy needed, was equally sure that he did not want Lilian to go in that direction. He greatly preferred the country for her, and cheerful quiet instead of the excitement of travel. Plainly the father must be separated from his daughter, if he was to do what was best for both children. The question which remained was, could and would Rebecca assume the entire charge of Lilian until such time as he could again give her his personal care? "You remember," he said, breaking off to give her a searching look, "what you said to her mother?"

"Yes," said Rebecca, her lip quivering a little, "I remember; I shall be glad to keep my word."

He seemed greatly relieved, and thanked her earnestly; then went back to business. It remained to decide where he should place the two during his absence. He had relatives unnumbered, he explained, with the shadow of a smile flitting across his grave face; but no mother nor sister nor very near and dear friend. His aunts and cousins, three of them, had kindly offered, even urged their homes as the fitting place, but there were reasons why some other would be preferable. For one thing the climate was not in those localities as desirable as it might be, and besides — What did she think? Would she object to having Lilian entirely removed from any of her family friends?

"I should prefer it," said Rebecca quickly; "that is—I beg your pardon; I mean if I am to have the sole responsibility—I think"—And there she stopped.

"Yes," he said, he perfectly understood and quite agreed with her. Assuredly she was to have the sole responsibility. Then was there any place with which she was acquainted, and for which she had a preference. If so, he would be glad to have her mention it, and he would take it into careful consideration.

Then came to Rebecca a vision of her father's last letter. Only a few lines, he lived such a busy life; but the closing lines were: "O, daughter! when are we to have a sight of your face? Your last letters have done us good, in many respects; but I own that they have made us hungry to see you. How much longer must we wait?"

How long would it be, in view of these plans, before she could see her father? She had written several letters since that first one, all beginning, "Dear father and mother:" and Mrs. Meredith had replied to them, saying "we," as her father always did, and giving pleasant home news, and being cordial in her tone. Before sickness and death came into their midst Rebecca had thought of planning a vacation and a visit home; after that, she put it from her indefinitely. She thought rapidly while Mr. McKenzie waited, then spoke from the impulse which had just come to her.

"I have not had time to think, of course; but would you object to my taking Miss Lilian to my own home for a time?"

He was not one to agree blindly to anything. He questioned carefully. Where was her home, and what were its surroundings? O, yes! he knew that region of country; in point of health it was all that could be desired. Did her people live in town? Ah! that was encouraging; half a mile out in so small a city as that was almost like the country. When he was told her father's given name he grew more interested still; asked when and where he graduated, and said at last, "Why, I must have known your father when I was a boy. Is it possible that he is John Ellis Meredith? I had a brother who was a chum of his; if I mistake not, I have visited at your father's old home." He looked steadily at Rebecca as he said these words, and she knew his knowledge of her father made him wonder why the daughter had chosen such work as she had. The color on her face deepened, but she answered his look.

"My father is a country physician in very moderate circumstances, and as there was no work at home needing me, I resolved to try to earn my living. My mother is dead, but my father's second wife is a good woman. I think Miss Lilian would be happy there."

Mr. McKenzie bowed. "Thank you," he said,

"for your confidence. And, Rebecca, it is not necessary for you to say 'Miss Lilian'; you are too much to her, and too thoroughly a tried and trusted friend of the family to make such formality necessary or desirable."

Matters shaped themselves with astonishing rapidity after that. Rebecca's letter home was replied to by the first possible mail. They were more than willing to receive her charge.

"Indeed," wrote Mrs. Meredith, "your father is so hungry for a sight of you that I think he would accept any conditions. But, aside from that, we are sorry for the little motherless one, and will be glad to help you make her happy. We think it was very kind in you to be willing to assume her care. As for the terms mentioned, they are liberal in the extreme; indeed, we hardly feel willing to receive so large a sum for the board of a little child. Your father thinks you would better explain that we live very simply, and that no such amount is necessary."

Rebecca carried the message to Mr. McKenzie, and he paid quite as much attention to it as she had supposed he would.

"I am fully aware that I am receiving that for which money cannot pay; but at the same time I wish to have money do what it can. The terms I mentioned included your own board, Rebecca, for I wished you to feel quite free to give your entire time to Lilian if you chose."

In an incredibly short space of time, considering the amount of work to be done, the great house was put in order for an indefinite absence, the servants scattered to various points, the housekeeper sent to spend the summer, and as much longer as was necessary, with her married daughter, and Mr. McKenzie, attended by his faithful Rogers, was ready for a sea voyage. Only the day before they were to sail, he took Rebecca and her charge as far as the junction where they made their last change of cars. He had planned to go all the way, but business matters of great importance delayed him, and Rebecca assured him that all they would have to do after changing at the junction would be to sit still until her father came to meet them at their own station. But there were a hundred and fifty miles to ride before the junction was reached, during which Rebecca was for the first time in her life taken care of on a journey. Mr. McKenzie was a man who seemed to know by intuition just when windows and blinds and shades needed attention, or just when a glass of water or an orange would be refreshing. Apparently he devoted himself to Lilian—a looker-on would have said that he had eyes and ears for none but her—yet during that long morning Rebecca never needed fan, or traveling bag, or convenience of any sort, but he seemed to know it, and was at hand.

CHAPTER XIX.

OBLIGATIONS.

NOW began for Rebecca Meredith an effort to find her place in her old home, or to make a new place for herself. In truth, this last expression is the one which fitted, for Rebecca was not the young woman who had gone away with her heart sore against the new comer. It took but a few days for Mrs. Meredith to discover the change in her step-daughter, but she marveled over it. What could have come into the girl's life to give her that settled air of peace? Rebecca was in some respects fully as reserved as she had always been. Not even to her father did she consider it necessary to make elaborate explanations. Mr. McKenzie, man of means though he evidently was, had for some reason been induced to receive boarders, or, at least, a boarder into his family; this was all they knew. Husband and wife speculated over it occasionally.

"Perhaps she was a particular friend of the

dead wife," Mrs. Meredith said; "she seems very fond of her. Yesterday, when she was speaking about her the tears filled her eyes. Then, she is extravagantly fond of Liliañ; I suppose the dear little thing reminds her of Ailee."

As the weeks went by it became increasingly apparent to Rebecca that she had made her own discomforts at home, and made them out of very slight material. Mrs. Meredith, seen through clear and unprejudiced eyes, proved herself to be a warm-hearted, well-intentioned woman; one who had married her husband for love, and who had had a vivid sense of her responsibility as a step-mother, and an earnest determination to do her duty. The kindly way in which she received Lillian to her heart, and the unselfish manner in which she planned for her gave proof of what she would have done for Ailee, had the older sister given her a chance.

"I was unjust to her," Rebecca told herself, as she went over the past one evening carefully. "I was to blame; the position was hard for her, too. I ought to have thought of that; I never did, once. I thought only for myself. She loves my father, and has been his helper and care-taker during the time when his daughter deserted him; and she has received me back as though I gave her when I was here before, all the courtesy and attention which her position demanded. It is humiliating to have to own it, but I believe I was altogether to

blame. Shall I tell her so? Or will it be better to ignore the past and show her by my daily life that she has her rightful place now? Let me think." The result of the thinking was, that she determined to act as though there had been no "past" which needed righting. "It is not as though I could put my hand on any word or act of mine, and say to her 'that was wrong,'" said Rebecca, to that safe confidante, herself. "In such a case I should know what ought to be done; but it was the atmosphere in which I wrapped myself that was to blame; and some way, one cannot apologize for an atmosphere, at least, until we are on more intimate terms. There may come a time when I shall want to say to her, 'I think I was insufferable during those first years of your coming to us; not in any special way, but on general principles;' but at present, if I were in her place, I think I should want me to keep still."

So she kept still, so far as any past experiences were concerned. But what an utterly changed atmosphere there was.

Dr. Meredith, preoccupied man that he was, felt, rather than noticed, the change. Much as he had longed to see his only daughter, there had been times when he had thought of her coming with foreboding, remembering how uncomfortable some of the hours had been before she went away. But during these days his face beamed continually with satisfaction. It was one evening, just after

Rebecca had intercepted Mrs. Meredith with her arms full of fresh linen to be laid away in the china closet, with the words, "Let me do that for you, mother," that Dr. Meredith spoke his thoughts.

"How did we ever get on without you, daughter? We cannot let her go away again; can we, mother?"

Mrs. Meredith smiled, and resigned her pile of napkins. "We must contrive some plan for imprisoning both her and Sunny," she said. "I am sure I don't know what we would do without them."

"Sunny" was the pet name which both Dr. Meredith and his wife had adopted for Lillian, and it fitted her well. Mercifully for her, the baby was too young to have the sorrow which had so early shadowed her life make a present deep impression, and no bird once imprisoned, was ever more free and glad than she was in being emancipated from her city home, and allowed to roam over the large garden, or even go out of the gate and walk down to the corner "all by herself," as she dictated to her father, "only Rebie stood at the gate and watched."

Those letters to her father were a daily satisfaction to the little girl. Rebecca, under promise to write by every steamer, had planned that the child should send all the messages, she acting merely as scribe; so the afternoon hour which

had always been given to "papa" was sacred to him still, and not even an invitation to ride to the stable with Dr. Meredith was sufficient to win the faithful baby from the "talk wiv papa."

As for the letters which came to her from across the ocean, they grew more interesting each week. They came always addressed to "Miss Lilian McKenzie," and an evident effort was made to suit the language to her capacity; but the fact remained that very much of the detail, though beyond her grasp, was of absorbing interest to the Meredith household. It grew to be the expected entertainment over the doctor's evening cup of tea to have bits read to him from the European letters.

"It is almost as good as going abroad one's self," Mrs. Meredith said one evening, after a particularly graphic account of a day's experience had been given; "but it is really pitiful to see that baby try to understand it all. What a wise look she puts on when they are being read, and she sits as still as a mouse to the very end. I think she is a remarkable child."

"They are quite a success as children's letters," said the doctor. "It surprises me to see how much there is that she can understand; but McKenzie evidently has in mind the interests of the older children while he writes; he was always thoughtful for others even when a mere boy; I remember him very well. He was sure to have

something of interest to tell father and mother after a day's pleasuring. The rest of the scapegraces never thought of it, but McKenzie would say, 'Boys, your father will like to hear about that, won't he?' or, 'I think your mother would like some of these wild flowers.' It seems remarkable that Rebecca, in that great city, should have come in contact with a friend of my boyhood. Oh! he is a dozen years younger than I, but my brother Bert was very fond of him, and we all liked him. Was it on the score of old acquaintance that he took you to board? I wonder you never mentioned the matter in your letters."

"No, sir," said Rebecca, with heightened color; "I did not know of the old acquaintance until a short time before I came home; it had nothing to do with my being in his family."

Then she somewhat hurriedly turned the conversation; she did not feel ready, yet, to tell her father that she was in Mr. McKenzie's house, in the capacity of nurse for Lilian. She was not ashamed of it, but her father might be annoyed; she could not be sure whether he would honor her for her independence, or feel that she had done a foolish thing.

There is no denying that Rebecca liked independence. Pleasant as it was to be at home — and it grew daily more so — there was a sense of deep satisfaction in the fact that the ample price which Mr. McKenzie paid was entirely sufficient

to cover the board of two, and that while she was enjoying the privileges of a daughter at home she was at the same time earning her living. Coupled with this satisfaction, as the days passed, was an uneasy feeling that such a state of things could not last. The summer was speeding away; in the early autumn Mr. McKenzie would return, and Lilian would be summoned home; then what would become of her? If she went back to his house in the position which she had occupied before, her father must, of course, fully understand the situation. Of course she could go, even though he disapproved, for she remembered, with a shade of sadness, that her youth was gone, and that most people would probably commend her for insisting upon an independent course in life, since it was evident that however much her father might enjoy her company, he was in no real need of her. But did she want to return to the McKenzie household as a child's nurse? It was all very well for her to accept the situation in the first place, and she should always be glad that she had done so, but did it not behoove her to spend her time in trying to fit herself for some position which she could wisely fill, when she should be considered too old for a nurse-girl? Had she any right to usurp such a place, and thereby stand in the way of some faithful girl, when she was entirely able to earn her living in other ways?

Her thoughts went back to "Madame's" sewing-

room, and to the stuffy room on the fourth floor back in that respectable boarding-house, and she shivered. Could she go back to such a life? But that was not necessary. If her father and mother would not object, she might sew with Mrs. Draper in their own town, learning from her all the necessary points which would make her independent. She winced a little at the thought; her father, although a poor physician, was a leading man in the town, and she had been accustomed all her life to being looked up to as a leader. How would it seem to become a sewing woman at Mrs. Draper's, and, in the course of time, to serve those ladies who now received with pleasure her formal calls? But what would those same ladies think if they knew that she was now, and had been for some time, a nurse girl receiving monthly wages? She could not help laughing over the thought of their horror. "So kind of you to give your time to the motherless little one!" they were in the habit of murmuring to her, while they caressed Lilian. Finally she dismissed the whole subject, as much as possible, from her thoughts; her present duty was plain; she would wait until she could see the next step.

But when it became probable that each next letter would set the date for Mr. McKenzie's return, Mrs. Meredith could not keep her thoughts nor her words from the subject.

"What will the little darling do without you!"

she exclaimed, rather than asked, one day just as the little one had whisked away from them to meet Dr. Meredith at the door. "It gives me the heartache to think of it; both for her and for ourselves. What will her father do with her in a house full of servants? It does not seem as though she ought to be left in that way. What a pity he hasn't a dear auntie, or niece, or some one of his own flesh and blood. Do you know at all, what his plans are?"

Rebecca replied briefly that she did not. She supposed, of course, he would arrange to have Lilian with him, for he was devoted to her. Probably the housekeeper would have the general charge of her; for the rest, she did not know.

"For the rest she will have some worthless nurse girl," said Mrs. Meredith gloomily. "Isn't it a pity? Do you never think, Rebecca, that possibly, if you should offer to do so, he would be glad to have you keep her right here with us all, for the winter? If, as you say, he is devoted to her, he will study her best interests, and I am sure he must know that it will not be well for her to be under the care of hirelings."

Rebecca smiled; she was herself a "hireling," and Mr. McKenzie had entrusted his treasure to her, and been glad to do so; but she did not explain this. She merely said that she had almost no hope of the father's doing any such thing.

She did not believe he would feel that he could get through the winter without Lilian; it had been very hard for him to go abroad, on her account. He gave more care and thought to his little child than most fathers did; the mother, having been an invalid for so long, had made him try to supply the place of both father and mother. Further than that, she kept her own counsel; and Mrs. Meredith and her husband puzzled over the future without her.

It was well for Rebecca that she had learned where to carry her anxieties. She prayed much about Lilian's future — her own did not seem to be important enough to trouble her greatly — but it was of infinite importance that the little one should fall into the right hands. It was blessed to remember that the Lord Jesus knew just whose hands to provide for her. Sometimes this rested Rebecca utterly; at other times, she felt as though no hands but her own could have to do with her darling.

Late in September, when the foreign mail was watched for with an interest which amounted to nervousness, came a letter which overturned all their attempts at planning.

Mr. McKenzie wrote this time to Rebecca. Not that the envelope was addressed to her; it was "Miss Lilian McKenzie," as usual, and the child had her portion; but there was a separate sheet for Rebecca, in which the writer detailed their

possible plans. His son, though steadily gaining, was still far from strong; his mother's death had been a terrible shock to his nervous system, the news coming to him as it did when he was weak from disease, and when he was hourly hoping to have her beside him. An eminent physician had been consulted, who gave it as his opinion that for the young man to drop all thought of study for a year and travel abroad, would be the simplest and surest way of putting his health upon an assured basis for the future. The father considered him too young to be left in a strange land alone, and there were no friends abroad at present with whom he cared to stay. Moreover, Mr. McKenzie's business partners were writing him that since he was over there, it seemed to them it would be well for him to attend to the interests of the firm abroad, rather than to send some one else to do so, as had been planned. All things considered, he had determined to lay the case before Rebecca, and let her decision fix theirs. If she was willing to assume the care of Lilian for the winter, and until such time in the spring or early summer as he could come for her, he would spend the winter abroad, and travel with his son, at the same time giving careful attention to the foreign interests of the firm. If, for any reason, she was unwilling or unable to assume further responsibility in regard to Lilian, he would make arrangements for an immediate return, as he would under no cir-

cumstances consent to leave her with any other person. If Rebecca's father and mother could and would receive his little daughter as a boarder for the winter, under the management of herself, he would see his way plain. There followed certain money arrangements suggested in case she could fall in with his plans, which were even more liberal than the present basis.

Rebecca, with her cheeks aglow with pleasure, carried the letter at once to the family sitting-room, calling out to Mrs. Meredith, who was leaving the room by another door as she entered, "O, mother, wait! here is news which you will like."

She was too preoccupied to note the look of satisfaction on her father's face, the while. It was a great comfort to him to hear his daughter address her step-mother in that tone.

He paced the floor thoughtfully after hearing the letter, while the two ladies were expressing their entire satisfaction — even delight — over its contents. Presently he made known the cause of his disturbance. He did not feel that to receive such an exorbitant sum for Lilian's board was either honest or comfortable. There was more excuse for it, perhaps, as a temporary arrangement during the summer months, but to accept such terms for an entire year was not in accordance with his ideas of propriety. Rebecca would better write, explaining this carefully, and naming a sum which would be entirely sufficient to cover all

expense, which instruction Rebecca obeyed. Mr. McKenzie's reply was sent to her father—a genial letter, such as one friend might write to another.

"As regards the money obligation between us," he wrote, "I am well aware that I am receiving in your home that for which money cannot pay; and yet I trust you will allow me by it to express, so far as money can, my sense of obligation. Let me say just here that what your daughter has been to my child, and to the child's mother, I can never express in words, and I do not have the slightest idea of trying to make payment for the same; but I have money, good friend, and it pleases me to use some of it for this purpose.

"Perhaps you will allow me to express in this way my gratitude to the memory of your father and mother, who opened their home to a motherless boy, and made him feel for a few days as one of them. I have never forgotten their kindness. May I hope to number their son among my friends?"

"He knows how to write letters," said Dr. Meredith, after an interval of silence, "and he evidently has a high opinion of you, Rebecca."

Then he gave the letter to her to read.

In her own note of directions concerning Lilian was a blank check, with instructions to fill it out for whatever sum the child might need, in addition to what had been already sent.

CHAPTER XX.

POSSIBILITIES.

THERE followed an autumn and winter upon which Rebecca afterwards looked back as one of delightful memory. There were very few clouds to mar its brightness. Lilian was well, and as happy as a bird, and grew beautiful, as the weeks passed. To the doctor and Mrs. Meredith, she was a source of unfailing delight. Indeed, the doctor, who had been careful sometimes almost to sternness with his own children, was so nearly inclined to spoil this one, that Rebecca had to be on the watch. As for Mrs. Meredith — now that she could be seen with unprejudiced eyes — Rebecca frankly admitted to herself that her step-mother was an unusually wise and judicious woman, especially as regarded children. Sometimes the elder sister sighed over the thought of Ailee, and of what her own selfish love had deprived the child. They had long pleasant talks, she and her mother, during these days; they consulted in re-

gard to all matters concerning Lilian, not only, but, as the season waned, grew more and more intimate, until it became natural to Rebecca to "see what mother thought" about a thing, before she decided it. This she found to be good for her, in more ways than one. She discovered, though somewhat late in life, that it is possible for even sensible and well-trained girls to be too self-reliant and independent. That it is both natural and wise to lean a little on those who are older, and worth leaning upon. Also, it was good for her religious life. Some way it was a surprise to discover that her step-mother was something more than a church member—was a humble, consistent, every-day Christian.

It was Mrs. Meredith who sought a confidence in this direction. "I did not know you as a Christian, Rebecca," she said one day, when some subject had come up for discussion, about which the girl had expressed herself warmly. "I think I did you injustice."

Rebecca's face flushed. "Before I left home, do you mean? No; you could not have done me injustice. I was one of those that the Bible describes; I 'had a name to live and was dead.' I think myself that I was not a Christian at all, only a church member. I know religion was not to me what it is now; and I think I believed that all, or, at least, most professing Christians had no more than I had myself."

"I made a mistake," said Mrs. Meredith thoughtfully. "I have made a great many such mistakes, I believe; I was brought up with a morbid fear of repelling people by mentioning religious things to them, and I had a fear of driving you farther from me, if I attempted to be frank about such matters. But I am growing into the belief that harm is oftener done by silence, than by speech. Why is it not perfectly natural for us to show our keen and constant interest in that which is of the utmost importance not only to ourselves, but to all others?"

Rebecca had no answer ready; she was wondering whether, had Mrs. Meredith tried to win her confidence in those days, she would have accomplished it. What if she had tried to show her Christ as he was revealed to her now? What if she had succeeded? Would the story of her life have been utterly different? Would she, then, not have gone away from home? In that case, she would not have known Mrs. McKenzie, and would have had no Lilian. Oh! was it all mapped out for her, the way which was really the best for her feet to take? Had the Father in Heaven wanted for her just the experience she had had? If so, why? What was she to be and do in the future, because of this training?

The queries were so bewildering that she turned from them; she must let the future alone. If she were to stay on at home with her father and

mother, and do with and for them what she could, and if other hands than hers were to train and care for Lillian, why, she must learn that He was planning this also; but, at least, she need not look forward; present duty was plain enough.

Meantime, there was very pleasant work connected with Lillian. Those letters which were daily dictated to the absent father grew to be as much a part of their life as were any of their regular occupations. Rebecca realized that it was certainly her duty to keep alive in the heart of so young a child vivid memories of her father, and she strove faithfully to do so, with abundant success. The word "papa" was as frequently on the little girl's lips as though she had parted from him but that morning. She prattled continually of the things which she would do and say when "papa" came home.

Of her own pretty little will she had elected to call Dr. and Mrs. Meredith "Grandpa" and "Grandma." Rebecca had struggled with this, and tried to teach the child differently; but Lillian, who had a mind of her own, and who had heard the names "Grandpa" and "Grandma" constantly on the lips of a little next-door neighbor, had persisted in claiming grandparents for herself, greatly to the amusement of Dr. Meredith, who wrote to his son Hervey, in India, that a beautiful little grandchild had at last adopted him. Finally Rebecca, true to her frank nature, had reported to

the father Lilian's freak, and asked for orders from headquarters. He had promptly responded that if it was not disagreeable to Dr. and Mrs. Meredith he hoped they would indulge the child; she had no grandparents of her own, and if she could borrow some for the present no harm could be done. She would learn all too soon, probably, that death had bereft her of many ties which rightly belonged to others. So "Grandma" and "Doctor Grandpa" were names rung through the house in the sweetest of voices, and the words were often on her lips when she was dictating her letters. But here Rebecca drew the line. The child might use the names if she would, but her scribe would not write them. She said nothing of this to Lilian, but resorted to many ingenious devices to make her sentences sound natural and child-like without them.

There was ever-increasing pleasure not only, but profit as well, to be derived from the replies to these letters, which never failed to come. Gradually Mr. McKenzie ceased to write all his items in the name of his little daughter, but after giving her a generous portion he would commence a fresh sheet with "Dear friends," which Rebecca judged meant the household, so the letters were enjoyed together, and rare letters they were.

All too rapidly, for some of the parties concerned, that winter sped away. Looking back upon it, one experience only stood out disagree-

ably. Rebecca's old acquaintance, Mr. Fred Pierson, took up his residence for apparently an indefinite period in the town, and made persistent and painstaking efforts to establish himself in the Meredith household on the old footing.

Dr. Meredith received his advances with due cordiality. In the old days he had been mildly surprised to discover that Mr. Pierson did not in the course of events become his son-in-law. But his daughter seemed not to share that surprise, and he concluded that he had been mistaken, and gave it no more thought. Now, as he noted the man's evident effort at friendship, his mind reverted to the old days, and he wondered if some youthful misunderstanding had separated the two, and if the long ago expected was now about to be.

The thought was not unpleasant to him. Mr. Pierson was of good family, and was a man of means. Moreover, he was a very genial man, and from Dr. Meredith's point of view was the soul of uprightness. If Rebecca was willing to receive his advances she would meet with no opposition from her father.

But it very soon became apparent, even to his preoccupied mind, that Rebecca was not willing. On the contrary, she avoided Mr. Pierson at every turn, and so skillfully did she manage to be invisible during his visits, even after studious planning on his part to take her unawares, that at last, in sheer despair, he made a partial confidant of her father.

One morning Dr. Meredith, instead of rushing away the moment his office hours were over, came upstairs to Rebecca's room to ask if she could leave Lilian with her mother and give him a few minutes in the office. Then he came directly to the point. Mr. Pierson had formally asked his permission to win his daughter, if he could. He had also confessed to him that years ago there had happened that which had offended or at least grieved Rebecca to the degree that now she would not forgive him sufficiently to allow him opportunity to explain the past, which he felt sure he could do if she would but listen. In short, he had secured Dr. Meredith as an ally, and had plead his cause with him so successfully that the father was moved to ask if Rebecca was sure she was doing right to let a boy-and-girl quarrel stand in the way of the love of a true man.

Then Rebecca thought the time had come for plain speaking. She went back into her girlhood, and let her father have a glimpse of those weary days which this man who was talking about a "misunderstanding," had brought upon her. She told him of the interview held in Mr. McKenzie's parlor, and of the detailed "explanation" in writing, with which Mr. Pierson had insulted her; and the father's righteous soul was filled with indignation over it all.

"I wish I had known it before," he said, speaking with a sort of wistful tenderness. "There are

some things which I would have understood much better, daughter, if I had known what you had had to bear; of course, you cannot respect the man. I wonder at his lack of sense! What strange friendships his must have been. Do not be troubled about it, Rebecca; I will see to it that he does not intrude upon you again. If I had only understood I might have made it quite plain, instead of wasting sympathy on him."

And Rebecca went away from the interview, feeling that, added to the long list of her mistakes, was this one: that she had not been on more confidential terms with her good father.

However Dr. Meredith worded his message, it seemed to be effectual. Very soon thereafter, Mr. Pierson left town, and Rebecca heard no more of him. But the memory of his persistent efforts to renew the old friendship was the one ugly spot in that bright winter. It sped away, and the lovely June days were upon them before the foreign letters began to speak of definite dates for the homeward journey. Carroll was now quite restored to health, and eager to get back to his own land. Business, however, would hold the father for a few days yet, possibly for a few weeks; but sometime in July, or certainly early in August, they hoped to sail for home.

Over this letter more people than Rebecca looked grave. Of course the father's first thought, on reaching his native shores, would be for his

little daughter ; indeed, he had told her as much in his letter, and it followed that they must very soon be separated from her. Dr. Meredith drew a heavy sigh as he followed the child with his wistful eyes, and tried to think what the house would be like without her. As they sat and sewed that afternoon, while Lilian took her usual rest, mother and daughter discussed the possibilities.

"He seems strangely silent about future plans," said Mrs. Meredith. "He has seemed to depend so much on your judgment, I wonder he does not advise with you as to his next step. Is he naturally a reserved man?"

Rebecca considered for a moment before she replied : "Yes ; I think he would be called so. He is one who seems to know what he means to do, but he doesn't mention it until it is necessary. He has some plans formed, without doubt."

"Perhaps he intends soon to marry again?"

There was not a moment's hesitation this time in the response :

"Of course, that is entirely possible."

Both ladies sewed in silence for some minutes after this ; then Mrs. Meredith spoke with a slight hesitancy of manner, as though she was even yet not quite decided whether to speak :

"Rebecca, did you ever think that you might perhaps save the little girl much future pain, if you were to talk to her frankly about the possi-

bility of her having another mother? She is such a precocious little creature and so devoted to you that she would understand, and you could mould her to your way of thinking. I have often thought that if good women would only frankly explain to children about such things—help them to understand that a second mother does not come to push out from their hearts the real mother, but only as a friend who means to try to help them on the way home to her—a world of misery might be saved."

"Do you think there are many such second mothers?"

"Perhaps not many; but might there not be more, if they were met half-way? There are unwise and injudicious and even cruel real fathers and mothers in the world; but yet on the whole we believe in parents. Why should we condemn untried the step-mother, merely because she is a step-mother?"

Then Rebecca felt that that time which she had said would perhaps come had arrived.

"It is all wrong," she said frankly; "and I certainly ought to realize it. I was old enough to know better when my second mother came, but I had drank in from very babyhood the popular impression in regard to such relations. I did not know that I was prejudiced, but I can see now that I was; and I know I put away from me for years, that which might have helped me every

day of my life; but all the same, I find I shrink from having my Lilian under the care of a second mother, unless" — she made a sudden pause and laughed lightly, her face rosy the while.

"Well," said Mrs. Meredith, in the gentlest and most sympathetic of tones, "unless what, dear? I think I can appreciate your feeling."

"No, you hardly could. I was about to say a very absurd thing, under the circumstances. I cannot think of any woman in the world whom I would like to have 'mother' my Lilian save yourself, and that, manifestly, is impossible."

She ought to have raised her eyes just then, to have seen the light on her step-mother's face. It was very bright, and very tender. It was not the sort of confidence which she had expected, but evidently it was sweet to her.

"Thank you," she said, in a low, moved tone. Then, apparently feeling that it would help them both to treat the subject lightly, Mrs. Meredith added, "I confess I should like to have some sort of claim upon the little darling, but there certainly are serious objections to the way you propose."

Probably both ladies were glad that at the moment Lilian's voice was heard in the adjoining room, and confidences were over for the present.

But Rebecca did not easily get away from the hint which had been given her. She pondered over the question whether she ought to try to talk

to Lilian about a future which might come to her. Could she, for instance, tell her about a dear friend which her father might bring to care for and love her? But then, if no such thought should be in the father's mind, would not the child embarrass and annoy him by asking for such a friend? And would not the father consider it unwarrantable interference on her part? She found herself shrinking utterly from such a task. But there were others who were not so sensitive. On the very next afternoon when Lilian came to her for "papa's hour," she shocked her amanuensis by dictating the following:

"Papa, are you going to give Lilian a new mamma pretty soon?"

The pen dropped from Rebecca's fingers, and her voice expressed her dismay.

"Why, Lilian, darling, you must not ask papa such a question."

"Why not?" asked the baby, with very wide-open eyes. "Marie said so; she said maybe he would; she guessed he would; and she said she might be good, and maybe she would be naughty, and whip me — new mamas most always did. And I want you to ask him, and to tell him that Lilian doesn't want any new mamma at all, ever; she just wants her Rebie, and her Doctor Grandma, and her Doctor Grandpa."

Now "Marie" was a wise young woman of twelve or thirteen, whose father's grounds joined

their own, and who had delighted to spend much time with Lilian.

Writing was given over for that afternoon ; the little dictator was taken on Rebecca's lap, and if she did not learn some very important lessons during the next hour, it was not the earnest teacher's fault.

CHAPTER XXI.

A GLEAM OF GOLD.

IT was drawing toward the sunset of an August afternoon. The Meredith homestead was in after dinner order, and the guest chamber especially, hinted at an unexpected guest. There were fresh flowers in the vases, and the toilet table gave evidence of having been just looked after in the smallest detail. Out on the piazza, fluttering restlessly from hammock to hassock, or great easy-chair, was a vision in white and gold. Her fresh dress fell in spotless whiteness about her, and the curls of gold lay in careless grace on her neck. There was a pretty flush of expectancy on the little face, and her eyes were bright with excitement. Three times in the space of ten minutes had she asked Rebecca if she was "truly sure" that papa would know her the minute he saw her. With the third asking the sound of wheels could be heard on the carriage drive, and in a moment more Dr. Meredith appeared on the piazza, fol-

lowed by Mr. McKenzie. Then an uncontrollable fit of shyness came over Lilian, and instead of springing to meet her father she hid her curls in Rebecca's dress.

Life abroad had certainly done wonders for Mr. McKenzie. Rebecca marveled over it in the quiet of her own room that night. She had never seen him before without that look which she used to call sternness and hauteur, but which she had learned to know was born of vigilance and rigid self-control. His face had cleared wonderfully, and under the excitement and delight of meeting Lilian, it had a light in it which made him look almost boyish. The child had very promptly laid aside her shyness, and had been nestled in his arms most of the time until her hour for retiring. Even then she had gone to her room in her father's arms, and he had returned again when she was in her crib, and had sat beside her until the eyelids drooped.

"I can hardly make myself come away from her," he said smilingly to Rebecca, who waited in the hall to see that her treasure was entirely comfortable. But after that, he had returned to the parlor and they had sat late, listening to his animated descriptions of life abroad. Certainly no one could seem less like a stranger on a business errand than did Mr. McKenzie. Rebecca could not remember a guest whom her father had enjoyed so much. Two entire days passed, and still

no word of plans had been spoken. Mr. McKenzie had declared that although he had been traveling abroad, he had never given himself more thoroughly to business than he had for the past six months, at least; and if they would permit him, he was going now to take two or three days of entire vacation, and make love to his daughter. Lilian approved the plan. She was set free from all her quaint little duties and lessons, which Rebecca had instituted, and which were a continued delight and amusement to the child, and became inseparable from her father. Whether in his room or in the garden among the flowers, or lounging at his ease in the breezy back parlor, the child's clear voice could be heard in almost continuous prattle, interrupted frequently by bursts of laughter from the highly amused father. Rebecca, listening, could not remember that she had ever before heard him laugh; nor could she, of all persons, wonder at this, when she thought of his strange, sad past. On the morning of the third day he had a plan to propose, but only for entertainment.

"Lilian tells me," he said at the breakfast table, "about a wonderful grove where mosses and vines, and I don't know what treasures, can be found; and where there is a place to hang a hammock, and a place to eat a lunch, and — what else, Lilian? She has filled me with the desire to see all these delights; what do you say to pilot-

ing us thither, and smuggling along a lunch for our benefit? Would not that be a kind thing to do?"

The question was addressed to Rebecca, and that young woman who remembered always that she was in this man's employ, gravely signified her readiness to serve him in any way that she could. Plans for horses and carriage were then discussed with Dr. Meredith, while Mrs. Meredith and her daughter decided on what should go into the luncheon basket; and precisely at ten o'clock they were off for the day's pleasuring.

"He seems to take it for granted that Rebecca will be at his call for any plan which he wants carried out," said Dr. Meredith, looking after the retreating carriage with a slight cloud on his face. His own carriage was waiting for him to make his daily round of calls, and he had only lingered to see the picnic party start.

"I wonder," he added, after a moment's silence, "if he supposes he can keep such a woman as Rebecca in the position of nursery governess? The child is winning enough to steal anybody's heart, but people have to think for themselves a little in this world. I certainly cannot consent to any such arrangement."

Mrs. Meredith opened her lips to reply, then closed them again. Why should she undertake to furnish eyes to the blind? But as her husband rode away she smiled as she thought how strange

it was that even a man like Dr. Meredith could be so obtuse. "Nursery governess" indeed!

For this was Rebecca's own suggestion which was rankling in her father's heart this perfect August morning. Revolving in her mind various schemes connected with Lilian, there had occurred the idea that with Mrs. Barnett for housekeeper there could be no sensible reason why she should not go back for awhile to the McKenzie home and care for Lilian; at least until the child became acquainted with others who could take her place. "Until he brings home the new mother," she said to herself. "After that, for Lilian's sake, I would better go; then I should have done all I could for her." But this part she had not said to her father.

There had not been much opportunity to say anything to him in detail. He had frowned upon the entire scheme. Indeed, he did not think it would be well, even for a short time. McKenzie would be wild to suppose such an arrangement possible. It had been all right and proper for her to bring the child to her own home and care for her, as a friend of her mother's, but to go as a paid servant was quite another matter. They were all attached to the little one; it did not seem to him that he could spare her himself, and here the doctor's voice had trembled a little, but he checked the impulse to weakness, and drew himself up with dignity as he said, "But for all that, people must think of themselves a little. If

McKenzie wanted to select a nursery governess and send her to them for a few weeks, or even months, until she could win the child, and Rebecca could teach her her duties, he had no objection, but he was sure she would not enter into any arrangement which would be obnoxious to all his feelings as a father.

Then he took occasion to say to Rebecca that as for her thinking about going from home for the sake of relieving him financially, that was entirely unnecessary. Matters were looking up with him decidedly; two heavy old debts which he had supposed were quite lost had been most unexpectedly paid in full with accrued interest, and bills had been paid for the past year with astonishing promptness. In short, the embarrassments under which he had labored for some time were quite passed away, and nothing would please him better than to have Rebecca remain where she fitted in so exactly—in her father's house. He would never be willing to have her leave it again, save to go to one of her own; and if she chose the old home instead of a new one for herself, so much the better for them. And Rebecca had decided that that was by no means the time to tell her father that she had been, during the greater part of her absence, in the employ of Mr. McKenzie.

That picnic in the woods was an experience to remember. The place which Lillian had described was a popular resort for small pleasure parties,

and apparently more than the usual number had chosen this particular day for their visit to it. But they were all strangers to Rebecca, and did not in any way mar the pleasure of the day. Her satisfaction in it was hardly less than Lillian's. She had not been on a real pleasure excursion before in years, Lillian's acquaintance with the charmed spot having been made in a somewhat hurried drive which Dr. Meredith took them, when Lillian and her little playmate Marie amused her by leaving the carriage while the horses were drinking, and eating some biscuits and cookies on the great flat rock, which Marie said was a table. For the rest, Marie's glowing descriptions had to be drawn upon. But this was a "really truly" picnic such as Marie had described, and she was in it. The child was wild with delight, and Rebecca, who had resolved for one day to give over all anxious thought or foreboding of separation, and make her charge as happy as she could, met her half-way, and was apparently as light-hearted as the child.

It was after the luncheon had been eaten and enjoyed that Lillian, who had fluttered like a bird from one part of the grounds to another, admitted herself a "little tiny speck tired," and submitted to being put into the hammock for a few minutes' rest. She need not go to sleep, of course not; she was only to lie quiet without speaking for fifteen minutes by her father's watch; if, at the end

of that time, she wanted to run some more, he was to lift her out.

This scheme worked like a charm. Before ten of the fifteen minutes were gone the lids had drooped over two bright eyes, and when Mr. McKenzie turned with a smile, and showed Rebecca his watch to note that the time was up, Lilian was sound asleep.

"Precisely what I had hoped for," said her father. "A half-hour's sleep will greatly refresh her; moreover, Rebecca, I want an opportunity to talk quietly with you. Would you just as soon sit down for awhile with me under that tree, where we can keep the hammock in sight? I will not pledge you to stillness for fifteen minutes, but I do want to say something to you which can be better said if you are not roving about."

So Rebecca, laughing a little over this hint at the restlessness which had possessed her while Lilian was quiet, came obediently to the point he had selected, and seated herself. He waited to arrange the sun-umbrella at just the right angle to shade Lilian from the glimmerings of sunlight through the trees, then came and sat beside her.

"I wonder if you can imagine what I want to say," he began, and something in his tone made Rebecca's heart beat quickly. He had been very cordial and friendly with her; he evidently reposed great confidence in her. Did he mean to take her entirely into his confidence now, and tell

her about the new mother he had secured for Lilian?

"It seems to me," he continued, after waiting a moment for her reply, "that you must be able to guess the nature of what I want to say. I have made it plain in a way in my letters, I think, for some time. But I am a straightforward man, and when the time comes for saying what I have determined must be said, I know only plain and simple words in which to say it. Rebecca, I want to ask you to become my wife, and be a mother in name, as you have been in deed, to my little daughter. Am I wrong in thinking that this will not surprise you greatly? That your own heart has told you before now what mine would claim?"

But there was evidently not going to be a quiet talk under this tree. Rebecca spoke quickly, her face aglow and her eyes blazing with excitement:

"Yes; you are wrong — utterly wrong. I had not any such thought for a moment. I believed in you. I was hired for pay, as a nurse girl, but I can neither be hired nor bought for a wife. What have I ever done that you should insult me in this way?"

She had more to say, but her voice was beginning to tremble, and not for the world would she have let him see any tears; so she suddenly stopped to gain self-control. Mr. McKenzie regarded her in grave wonder.

"I do not understand you in the least," he said.

"How is it possible for you to place any such construction on the simple plain words which I spoke? If there could be any thought of insult between us, would it not rather be I who had received it? Do you think I would attempt to buy a wife?"

Already Rebecca was ashamed of her outburst; she would have given much to have been able to recall her words; they were so different from what she had meant to speak.

"I beg your pardon," she said hurriedly, but in quieter tones; "I had no right to speak as I did. But, Mr. McKenzie, we do not understand each other. What I meant was, that while I recognize now you are placed, and the necessity for having one whom you can trust, to care for Lillian; and while I know that you honor me in that you trust her welfare to me, I recognize the fact that you are thinking of her entirely; and I cannot, even for the privilege of caring for her, accept the position you have offered me. I do not believe that marriage means any such business transaction. I know there are those, respectable people, who think it is justifiable under such circumstances, but I am not one of them."

She dropped her eyes before his keen ones, and despite all effort could not keep hers from filling with tears. But his voice was never quieter than when he spoke again.

"Your conclusions are unjustifiable, Rebecca;

I think I have the right to be offended. No father can care for a child more, I think, than I care for Lilian, and for my boy; if I know my own heart, no interest of mine would lead me to peril their happiness. But I am something else, as well as a father, and when I seek a wife I am not in search of a woman to preside over my home, nor a mother for my children; I am in search of a wife. I would ask no one to stand at the marriage altar with me and hear me pledge before God to love, honor and cherish her, unless from my soul I was prepared to do all that such words involve. I am amazed that you should think so ill of me. I understand myself so well that I thought surely you would know all that I meant; but I must have blundered. It does not become me to speak much of the past, but, Rebecca, I may say to you that I have been a lonely man, even a desolate one for many years. If it were necessary, I might add that you are the only woman whom I care to win—the only one to whom I have given a thought; but to say that seems unworthy of me; of course you are, else I would not be saying to you what I have. Rebecca, you have utterly misunderstood me; have I also utterly misunderstood you? Is it true that you do not and cannot give me what I ask?"

"Papa," called Lilian, sitting erect in her hammock, "a great big flutterby came and sat on my

hand, and he left a piece of his wing all goldy on it when he flew away. Was that because he loved me?"

"Possibly," said Mr. McKenzie, with a perfectly grave face. "Sit still, Lilian, until I come to lift you out. The ground is damp around the hammock, and I do not wish you to step on it." Then he lowered his tone. "We have been interrupted, Rebecca, and perhaps it is better so. I fear I have been very abrupt. I do not want to force your reply; and, believe me, if I have been mistaken, and you cannot give me your heart, I have no wish to secure your hand. My mistake has been in believing that you knew me better than I see you do."

He drew from his pocket a plain ring of heavy gold, and dropped it lightly in her lap. "When I bought that in Florence," he said, "I thought only of you. I do not want to hurry your thought, or to embarrass you; there is much more I might say to you, but I have evidently chosen an inopportune time. I will make your answer to me as easy as possible. If, on thinking over what I have said, you care to let me prove to you how entirely I mean the words I have spoken, and how surely I would mean the vows which I have asked you to let me make in God's sight, then wear this ring when you come down to the parlor this evening, and I shall understand. If, on the other hand, you feel that you cannot give me your love and

your life—that it would be only a pain to you to hear more, put the ring away as a worthless thing, and I will understand, and will not in any way trouble or embarrass you."

Then he went over to Lilian, lifted her from the hammock, and walked with her down the hill to where the "flutterbys" were the busiest.

The remainder of that day was devoted by both of her companions to the child. Whether she realized how little they had to say to each other, and how willing they were to be led by every whim of hers, will not be known. Certainly she was very happy, and disposed to be grieved when her father announced that it was time to order the horses. During the rapid drive home the child kept up a continuous chatter, encouraged thereto by both her companions, and within ten minutes after they had reached her father's house Rebecca disappeared. Nor did she come down to the family tea-table.

"Lilian is tired, and does not wish to be freshly dressed for tea," Mrs. Meredith explained, "and Rebecca is disposed to humor her, so they are both going to take their tea upstairs; she begs that you will excuse Lilian to-night."

Mr. McKenzie bowed, and continued the conversation which he was carrying on with the doctor.

At the usual time he went up to Lilian, and found her in her crib waiting for him, quite alone, as usual; but the "flutterby" which had disturbed

her afternoon nap had also assisted in making her unusually sleepy. The utmost that she could give him were some choice kisses, and a murmured thanksgiving for the "perfectly sweet day" she had had, and then she was asleep.

Mr. McKenzie went back to the parlor, and the doctor reflected afterwards that he had never heard him talk better than he did that evening; but he interrupted himself in the midst of a sentence to spring to his feet and say, "Here is a chair, Rebecca," and there was that in his tone which made the doctor turn and look wonderingly at his daughter. He saw nothing in any wise different from usual; but his guest had detected the gleam of gold upon a finger of Rebecca's left hand.

CHAPTER XXII.

A CHANGE OF BASE.

“**B**UT I meant never to marry.”
“Yes ; I dare say.”

“I decided some time ago that I would devote myself to taking care of my father and mother when they grew old.”

“That is too difficult a task for one ; you need me to help you in it.”

The speaker was Mr. McKenzie, and of course his companion was Rebecca. He looked the picture of content, lounging in a great easy hammock, while she, who did not like a hammock, occupied a garden chair, and in her white dress and pink cheeks fitted into the garden very well.

She smiled comfortably over his last sentence, and continued, “I have always said that I did not believe in poor girls marrying rich men, and that I wouldn’t do it.”

“That was being cruel to me. Unfortunately, I suppose I am rather a rich man ; but I am heart-

less enough not to regret it under present circumstances. Since you have broken your wicked pledge, there are so many things I can make money do for you."

She laughed at that, but grew almost instantly grave.

"Still, there are things to be considered. I have been nurse-girl in your family for a long time, and people know it; they will talk, and it will be very unpleasant for you."

"That remark is unworthy of you." His calm contentment was evidently in no wise shaken; he even had a superior smile on his face as he answered her.

The pink on her cheeks deepened a little, and she answered earnestly, "It is very kind in you to speak of it in that way; but, seriously, don't you know there is truth in it? Don't you remember what hateful things people can and will say?"

"You are very fond of the truth," he said, still smiling; "I have always been impressed by that phase of your character. I will answer you with perfect frankness. I have no doubt that a certain class of people can and will say disagreeable things; what will take off their edge will be that they will not be true. If I had asked an ignorant, undisciplined, uncultured girl to be my wife, and the mother of my children, I might blush over the thought of people's tongues. That I have asked one who is by education and true culture in every

way fitted for the position is apparent to any eyes interested enough to look ; that she occupied for a time, for good and sufficient reasons, a position of trust in my own house, has nothing to do with the question ; and really and truly, I cannot bring myself to care in the least what the aforesaid tongues may say. Is that sufficiently truthful?"

She answered him with a look which he seemed to understand ; but the shadow returned to her face.

"Still, Mr. McKenzie"—

"I beg your pardon ; I don't think you are at present acquainted with any such person."

At this she could only laugh and blush. Her companion waited a moment, then said, with mock gravity, "The present incumbent positively refuses to acknowledge such title."

"Well, then, Deane."

"That is better ; go on ; I am all attention."

"But I want to talk to you very seriously."

"By all means ; you have impressed me as being entirely able to do just that sort of thing."

She would not be laughed away from her determination, but went on a trifle hurriedly.

"One thing I have always felt that I would not under any circumstances allow myself to do ; that is, to go into a home where there were children, and take the place and name of a mother. And this not for my own sake, but for the sake of children. It used to seem to me a cruel thing to do ;

and as such things are generally managed, I think so still."

Mr. McKenzie turned himself slightly in the hammock, so as to command a full view of her face, and said, gravely enough, "Rebecca, would you be willing to have Lilian under the charge of any woman but yourself?"

"No," she said frankly; "with Lilian the circumstances are peculiar; I was not thinking of her, but of Carroll. Mr. McKenzie, I know whereof I speak; I have a step-mother like unto few, I believe; and I have been brought up by persons of sound judgment and excellent common sense. Yet so under the dominion of popular ideas was I, that I looked upon my step-mother's coming as a calamity, and that only; moreover, I thought of myself, and not for a moment of her. I felt that my father, instead of thinking and of planning for me, had forgotten me, or grown weary of me, and had brought a stranger to fill his heart and push me out. That I was a simpleton, the years have proved; but they have not altered popular opinion in the least. I hear people talking to-day just as I thought then; I am thankful that I was kept from talking it. But all this experience makes me anxious for Carroll; and I want to talk with you very earnestly about his — our future."

Mr. McKenzie felt the seriousness of her tone; he must gird himself up for earnest talk, instead

of yielding to the wooing influences of the morning, and the spirit of playfulness that was upon him. He arose from his lounging attitude, and, after a moment, deserted the hammock altogether and took a garden chair directly in front of Rebecca.

The conversation was long, and at times spirited; there were certain plans which Mr. McKenzie did not mean to be argued out of; but when, two hours later, Lilian, who had been having a lovely morning with "Doctor Grandma," came to summon them to dinner, that gentleman said, in a half-discontented tone as they walked toward the house:

"You have overturned all my intentions, and given me a dreary winter prospect; not to mention Lilian's."

"Lilian will be very happy," said Rebecca firmly, "and so will you; because we are both persuaded that it is the right thing to be done. I have been long in discovering it, but I believe I know now that the only way to have any happiness worthy the name, is to do just right."

But the preliminary talk was all which had been held that morning. Many details had to be settled, and much had to be explained to Dr. and Mrs. Meredith. The doctor, whose busy life continued, so that he had not much time for explanations, hardly understood it, but his wife did, and heartily approved. Mr. McKenzie had planned

for a speedy marriage and a return as a family to the home at Carroll Place, as early as December ; but Rebecca's plans were of an entirely different character. The boy, Carroll, whom she had never seen, lay heavy on her heart.

"I would not have him live through such an experience as I have had, for anything in the world," she had told Mr. McKenzie earnestly.

He had argued that it was very different with boys ; they were much away from home, any way, and did not take things to heart as girls did.

"But I want to be taken to heart," said Rebecca ; "and if you will let me try, I believe I can be. I know a good deal about Carroll, although I have never seen him ; I have read some of his letters. I know he is devoted to you ; that you have been more to each other than father and son often are ; and I tell you I will not come a stranger into the home and seem to push him aside. I do not believe that boys are so very different from girls, in some things. I know a great deal about boys ; I had two brothers."

"But your scheme would not in most families be in the least degree feasible," complained Mr. McKenzie, who had been convinced and meant to help carry out the scheme, but who at times felt lonely and disappointed over it, and as if he must enjoy the luxury of grumbling.

"That is true," Rebecca admitted ; "but we are not planning for 'most families,' only for ourselves."

Her plan in brief, was this : Mr. McKenzie had up to this time kept his own counsel, and Carroll was ignorant of Rebecca Meredith's very existence. He knew, of course, where Lilian was, and that she was with her nurse, a woman whom his father trusted. He had shown no interest as to this woman's name, and had asked as few questions as college boys are apt to ask about such matters. Up to a few days before their departure for home, it had been his intention to accompany his father when he went for Lilian, but at the last minute a college friend, who had come out to Liverpool for his vacation, had persuaded him that the thing to be done was to go home with him for a few days and get a glimpse of the mountains. The father had been quite willing to press this plan, for he told himself that it would be time enough to confide his own hopes and plans to his son when he knew what Rebecca would say to them. It was this change of purpose which had made it possible for Rebecca to push her own scheme.

She proposed to go herself to the city where Carroll's university was located, take board in the same house with him, and spend the winter in cultivating his friendship. He was not, in the meantime, to know that she had ever heard of his father, or had any interest in him, save that of a human being whose lot was cast for a time in the same house. She had arranged in her own mind

every little detail, before she had ventured to suggest the subject to Mr. McKenzie.

In her girlhood she had been, perhaps, an exceptionally good performer on the piano, and, could she have been spared from home, her ambition would have been to take lessons of some celebrated teacher. This she had never been able to do, and of late years she had not touched a piano. Her winter at home, however, had done much toward reviving her former tastes, and she had practiced with sufficient regularity to reproduce the old desire to take lessons. This, then, was the very work which could keep her employed during the winter; and of all cities for taking music lessons, the one where Carroll was to be would have been chosen, had she had her choice. The one difficulty to be considered was the expense involved. But Rebecca discovered that with a small amount of help from her father, and with rigid economy in the matter of dress, she could manage a term of lessons. Her work since she left the "Madame's" had been liberally paid for, and her expenses had been very few.

Dr. Meredith listened, as has been said, in some bewilderment to this scheme. Hardly had he become accustomed to the thought that his daughter was actually to be Mrs. McKenzie, and to be, if that gentleman could bring it to pass, carried away from them in a very few months, than she came with a plan for going alone among strangers to

study music. He marveled over the pride which would lead a young woman to desire to turn student for a few months, under such circumstances; for Rebecca had not been able to bring herself to explain much about Carroll to either father or mother. Almost she felt as though the plan might possibly be looked upon as a tacit rebuke to their very different way of managing. But the few blundering words of explanation which she essayed to make to her step-mother were rewarded.

"I understand, dear," said Mrs. Meredith, interrupting her; "I see through the entire scheme; it is worthy of you, and I know God will bless you for it. I wish — no, never mind; everything has turned out well; we will not mourn over a past that we cannot make better." And thenceforth Mrs. Meredith was Rebecca's hearty ally, furthering all her wishes most skillfully, and taking it upon herself to explain as much as was needful to the hurried and sometimes perplexed father.

One phase of the project gave unmixed satisfaction to at least two of those concerned. Rebecca, in bringing herself to a state of willingness to be separated from Lilian, had discovered that there was but one woman with whom she was satisfied to leave her, and that was her step-mother. Accordingly, it had been arranged that the child should spend the winter with her dear "Doctor Grandma and Grandpa," which was the way she always spoke of them collectively.

"The fact is," said Mr. McKenzie to Rebecca, when at last every detail was settled, and he was to leave her on the following morning to make her preparations for a winter among strangers—"The fact is, everybody's comfort has been more or less thought of but mine. Your father and mother are to have my baby, Carroll is to have you, and I am to have nobody." He spoke in a half-whimsical tone, and laughed a little when he finished the sentence, but the laugh closed with a sigh that he made an effort to suppress.

"Poor papa!" said Rebecca. "I am really very sorry for you; but you would not like to have Lilian entirely in Mrs. Barnett's care, now would you? But she and Nancy will take excellent care of you, and the winter will slip away before we know it."

It was because of all these things that the first week in October found Rebecca Meredith settled in another boarding-house in a great city. Not this time a fourth-floor room, dingy and desolate, but in fairly comfortable quarters on the second floor. The house itself was very unlike that in which she made her first experience at boarding. It was situated in a quiet, pleasant part of the city, not a long walk from the university, nor from the professor's room where Rebecca took lessons and practiced. It was a large and well-furnished house with many boarders, numbers of them students of art, or music, or in the University.



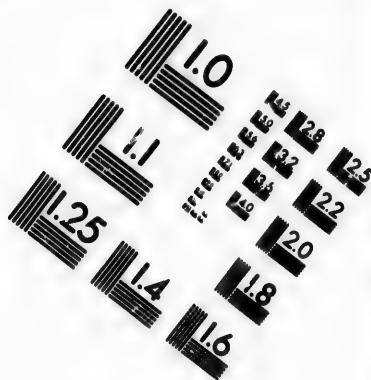
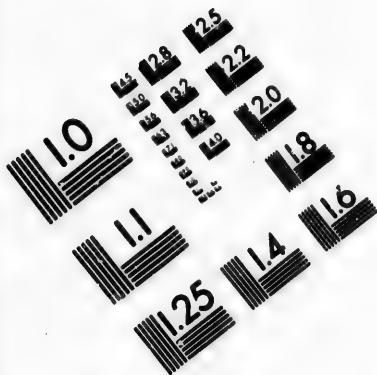
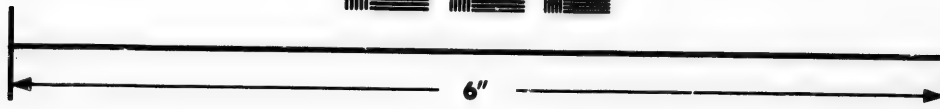
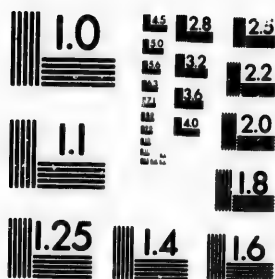


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A totally different life was this from any which Rebecca had ever known before; and although she shed some tears that first night before going to sleep, because, as she told herself, she missed Lilian so dreadfully, yet, on the whole, she was interested and excited. She studied the rows of young faces which appeared in the dining-room, and listened eagerly for names. In another day the university would open, and the students were flocking back. Carroll would certainly be there soon.

"How are you going to manage the matter?" Mr. McKenzie had asked her. "I might give you a letter of introduction, if you would; I could truthfully say you were the daughter of a friend of my boyhood. People frequently spend months in a large boarding-house without making one another's acquaintance, and especially boys do not get introduced to"—

"To old maids." Rebecca had interrupted him, smiling, and then had laughed at the expression on his face, and added: "Don't look so hopelessly shocked; that, of course, is what I am to the girls and boys. I used to dislike the name, once, but I do not seem to care in the least about it now. No, thank you; I want no letters of introduction; I am not going to be endured by Carroll simply for his father's sake. I shall make his acquaintance; I do not know just how; I have no plans; they are expected to evolve by degrees.

But if I do not succeed in winning him for a friend, why — I do not deserve to have him for one."

So she studied the new faces, and selected, on three different occasions, one which might be Carroll's. She had studied his photograph — the same which his mother had showed her — but his father said he had changed a good deal since then. Still, she thought she should know him. The day on which she made her selections was one in which a letter had come from Mr. McKenzie announcing that Carroll had started, but he would stop over one train, and possibly over night, with a former college friend.

There was also in this letter that which gave her food for thought. "I do not know," wrote Mr. McKenzie, "but it would have been wiser to have talked over with you some matters connected with Carroll; but our time was so short, and there was so much to settle. Then, too, I hardly knew what I wanted to say, and do not now. I have attempted several times to put on paper certain vague fears which I have concerning my boy, and have failed. He has some companions who exercise an unfortunate influence over him; in some respects he is easily led, and in other things he is obstinate. These college friends I know more about since coming home than I did before; two of them have been in town for a week or more, and they have been much

with Carroll. I do not like their influence over him ; I do not think he fully likes them himself, but they affect deep interest in him, possibly flatter him, and he is drawn with them more because they sort of surround him than because he cares for their company. They fill me with vague anxieties ; and yet, that just expresses it — they are vague. I do not know but that they are uncalled for. Possibly you know that Carroll's father has an intense hatred for tobacco in any form ; possibly you will think why I should fear that Carroll might be peculiarly susceptible to any such influence ; he knows my dislike of the weed, and, up to this time, has never used it. The two young men of whom I speak are inveterate smokers, and I overheard them chaffing him, as fellows will, about his 'womanish' habits, and I saw his face flush over it. This, and their fondness for the theater, are the only tangible causes for my discomfort, if they are tangible. Perhaps I should not have mentioned it to you ; and yet I find myself rather glad that I have done so. The young men in question are named Chester and Williston."

One of the three whom Rebecca selected as being possibly Carroll, she discovered afterwards was named Williston.

CHAPTER XXIII.

PROGRESSION.

BUT the next evening there came to the dining-room and seated himself opposite her a young man whose appearance almost took Rebecca's breath away. This was none other than Mr. McKenzie as she could readily imagine him to have been twenty years or so ago, save that this one had Mrs. McKenzie's beautifully shaped forehead and wavy hair. There was no question as to who he was. She did not need the murmur which went around the table back of her: "There is McKenzie!" nor the delighted greeting which those who came in later accorded to him. Evidently the young man was a favorite. He talked a good deal, and talked well. Moreover, he was attentive to his neighbor on the left, supplying her wants even before she had time to make them known; and as she was a middle-aged woman with an uninteresting face and disagreeable manner, Rebecca decided that it evidenced in him the per-

fection of courtesy — that which is born of real kindness of heart.

"How did you leave your father?" questioned a gentleman from across the table.

"Very well, sir, but extremely lonely. Other arrangements have been made since he saw you, and my little sister is to remain with friends in the country during the winter; this leaves my father quite alone. I am afraid he will have a dreary time." And the young man had no idea how sincerely the heart of the woman who was seated exactly opposite to him ached for the lonely father.

Two entire days passed before Rebecca discovered any pretext for making acquaintance with her opposite neighbor. Wasted days, she called them, although she had listened to every word that he said, and made as much of a study of character as she could out of them. He seemed not to have discovered her existence, and she was beginning to plan some way of being regularly introduced, when she came upon him in the hall. She had a roll of music in her hand, her intention being to steal a few minutes' practice on the piano before the boarders began to gather in the parlors, but through some carelessness on the part of servants the rooms had not yet been lighted, although the day was cloudy in the extreme, and the parlor curtains were drawn close, shutting out even the dull twilight. Rebecca was about to return to her

room when young McKenzie entered. Quick as thought her resolution was formed.

"I beg your pardon," she said, "but would you be so kind as to turn on the gas in the back parlor for me? It is very rude in me to ask you, I suppose, but I sit opposite you at table, and thought I might presume."

It was an absurd thing to say, and so Rebecca told herself afterwards; but it seemed to amuse McKenzie.

"That ought certainly to be sufficient introduction to secure so simple a service," he said politely, in his father's voice, albeit there was a merry twinkle in his eye. He drew a match from his pocket, and in a flash the parlor was a blaze of light.

"These old houses where the gas has to be lighted in the old-fashioned way are nuisances," he said, while Rebecca was noting with a sinking heart the place from which the matches came, and wondering if he had begun to smoke. Then she wondered what he would think if he knew that she cared.

He caught sight of the roll of music in her hand and asked if she would like to have the piano opened, going over to it as he spoke, and removing certain books which were in her way; then he lighted the burner which would give the best light for the piano.

It was undoubtedly a very small beginning, but it was a beginning. When they met at the dinner-

table half an hour later the young man recognized her by a slight bow and a look which said, "If you choose to consider us introduced, I am quite willing."

She returned the greeting cordially, and he passed her the bread, and summoned for her a waiter whose services he saw she needed. After that they exchanged bows when they met at table or in the halls. On the fifth morning Rebecca asked where Weston Hall was, and whether the line of cars which passed the door went anywhere near it.

McKenzie gave the desired information. No; the hall was five blocks away from the cars; but they were short blocks, and on a pleasant street. Then he added that there was to be a very choice concert at the hall that evening.

Yes, Rebecca said, she knew it, and had thought of attending.

At luncheon that same day they two came early, and were alone at their table. It seemed absurd not to talk a little about the weather, and kindred objects of importance. Once he had occasion to address her directly. "Shall I help you to some of the salad, Miss" — and he hesitated.

"Meredith," she said promptly. "It is quite time, I think, that neighbors knew each other's names."

"I think so," he answered heartily; "mine is McKenzie — Carroll McKenzie, University stu-

dent, at your service. It is only fair to say that I enjoyed your music last evening. I set my door open that I might hear it. You played a piece of which my father is very fond, and I am afraid I was guilty of being a trifle homesick over it."

This was certainly making progress. He must have felt flattered with his neighbor's evident interest in his father's tastes; she questioned, and cross-questioned, bent on being sure of the very piece of which he was fond. Very soon afterwards, McKenzie offered his services to see Rebecca safely over these five blocks from the street car to Weston Hall. He was going to the concert himself—he always went where he could hear good music, if possible—and it would be no trouble at all to show her the way, if she cared to allow him.

Rebecca felt afraid afterwards, that her acceptance was almost too eager. It was certainly a highly elated woman who went off an hour later to take her music lesson. In a letter she wrote that day occurred the following sentence: "I am going to a concert this evening; the finest one which has been given here this winter, my professor says; and I am going with a young gentleman named Carroll McKenzie. Ah, ah! what do you think of that? He has offered to see me safely from the car to the hall, and back, because I am a stranger and do not know the way; and he

is a gentleman, every inch of him. I don't need that letter of introduction, thank you."

In her room that evening before the dinner bell rang, Rebecca overheard a bit of conversation which helped her to some conclusions. It had struck her as a strange circumstance; was it a hint of the Guiding Hand helping her in her efforts to win a soul, that young McKenzie's room had been discovered to be the one next to her own? This might afford, as they became better acquainted, numberless opportunities for casual meetings in the halls, and exchanges of kindnesses. On this particular evening it afforded her an opportunity of another kind. The chambermaid had been giving her room an extra cleaning that day, and in rubbing the glass of the transom over the door, which was between the two rooms, had left it ajar; and McKenzie had company. Rebecca discovered this while changing her dress for dinner; also that she could hear conversation as well as though she were in the room.

"Oh! come now," said a voice which she recognized as Williston's, "don't be a mule, McKenzie; go with us this evening. We had no end of trouble getting another ticket for you in our section; we thought you would be delighted."

"I am, over your thoughtfulness, of course; but I have another engagement. I'm going down to Weston Hall to-night. The concert of the season is to be given there, you know."

"Oh! bother Weston Hall; throw that up. Talk about music, why, man alive, you ought to hear the little fairy who is to sing to-night in the opera! she beats all creation. You haven't seen her; the fellows are all raving over her. Why, her dress is well worth seeing, even if you don't care for her voice. Come, Carrol, old boy, give up your plans to-night and go with us; go for our sakes, if you won't for your own. Our lark will be spoiled without you."

"You are very good, Williston, to care so much for company;" and Rebecca could feel that the young man was touched by their friendship. "I don't really care for that sort of opera, you know; you remember last term I told you that it was not to my taste, and that I did not think I should go again; but since you and Chester have planned for it and want me particularly, I would go to-night just to please you, if I had not made an engagement. I promised to show the lady who sits opposite me at table, the way to the Hall; she is a stranger, and as I was going, it seemed friendly to look after her; so I offered."

"What, that old girl? My eyes! McKenzie, she isn't fishing for you, is she? Why, she's old enough to be your mother."

The answer came quickly, and for a moment Rebecca almost thought that the father must be there, so much was the son's voice like his, as she had heard it often.

"Hold up, Williston ; remember you are speaking about a lady. I don't like that sort of talk in my room."

"Oh ! now, McKenzie, don't flare. I mean no harm in life. What did I say, anyhow ? Is she your aunt, or something ?"

"She is nothing to me whatever, but a lady and a stranger. But a young man ought to respect the memory of his mother sufficiently to be courteous to all women, for her sake."

"All right, Mac. I'll go down on my knees to her, if you say so. She plays remarkably well for an every-day music teacher, as I suppose she is ; I'll say that for her. But I am afraid I shall owe her a grudge if she keeps you away from us to-night. I'll tell you what, Mac ; I see a way out. It was just like your amiability to offer to take care of her ; but Jimmy is going to the concert—the bell boy, you know. That oddity on the first floor who doesn't seem to know what to do with her money has given him a ticket ; you can get Jimmy to pilot your party safely to the hall ; he'll do anything for you. Why, he'll just be tickled to death to do it ; and you can come with us."

"Thank you," said McKenzie, and again his voice was like his father's when he found it necessary to reprove Nancy for some blunder ; "you are very kind, and most fertile in suggestions ; but I am not in the habit of delegating my duties

to Jimmy the bell boy. I shall keep my promise to the lady in question."

Then Chester, who had kept in the background during the interview, added his word: "Look here, McKenzie, if you persist in not carrying out a plan which we thought you would be delighted with, you will put us in a very embarrassing position. The fact is, we sort of promised you."

"Promised me!" There was more than astonishment in the tone.

"Yes; that is — why, you see it's this way: The Stover girls are going with us, and that throws their cousin out, don't you know? So we thought — well, in fact, I said to Annette that" —

McKenzie interrupted the somewhat stammering utterance.

"I understand; you said to Miss Stover that you would bring me along to look after the cousin. You were certainly thoughtful; but you forget one little circumstance. If you had recalled what I said last term — that under no conditions that I could conceive of did I care to be seen in public with Miss Stover's cousin again — it would have saved you much trouble. I always try to keep my own engagements, but fortunately I do not feel bound to keep those which other people make for me. I shall go to Weston Hall to-night."

And then Rebecca, who had been dressing with nervous haste, succeeded in pushing the last pin into place, and went downstairs, out of hearing of

the voices, with what speed she could. As she thought it over, she did not see how she could very well have avoided being a listener, since they persisted in paying no attention to any warning noises which she tried to make; and she could not help being glad that she had heard the conversation. She knew Carroll McKenzie better now than she had before. He might be easily led, but the leading would have to be in the line of honor and chivalry.

From this point her acquaintance with the young man progressed rapidly. Circumstances favored her in what she could not help considering a remarkable manner. For instance, within three weeks from the time of her first advance, McKenzie had an accident in the college laboratory. He was mounted on a step-ladder reaching after an important jar, and made a misstep. The fall sprained his ankle, so that he was obliged to rest quietly for several days; but this was not, to him, the worst feature of the accident; the jar had broken, and some of the inflammable liquid had splattered into his eyes. No serious results were apprehended, but a few days of bandaged eyes were a necessity. Over this the young man groaned. He had no time to spare to bandaged eyes. An examination was soon to take place in a very important study — a review of former work — and he, who had dropped out for a year, was by no means ready for the review. This he explained

in detail to Williston one morning, when the doors of both rooms were open, and Rebecca had the benefit.

"There never was a fellow who had worse luck," he growled. "How many times have I mounted that step-ladder and come down like a cat? And this time, just because it was important that I should be as careful as possible, I must needs come crashing down like a June bug. I don't know what I am to do; I really don't. There's that detestable review to cram for, and me without any eyes."

Then Williston, who was in the class below him, asked some questions, thereby enlightening Rebecca in regard to the review.

"I tell you what it is," began McKenzie again, "you fellows with eyes might help me. If I could have some of the stuff read over to me it would refresh my memory amazingly, and I could think it out pretty well while I lie here in the dark. You and Chester always seem to have more time on your hands than you know what to do with. Why couldn't you give me an hour or two apiece?"

"My dear fellow, so far as I am concerned nothing would give me greater pleasure, if I were able to do it; but I am simply a horrid reader. My father will not even allow me to run over the morning news for him when I am at home, because I rattle it off so—without regard to punctuation, you know, or sense, or anything."

Rebecca, in the shelter of her own room, curled her lip over the weakness of this sham excuse, and McKenzie seemed to take it at its true value.

"Oh!" he said, with mock commiseration, "what a pity. I did not know you were so afflicted; of course it wouldn't do at all; a thing of this kind requires very careful reading — needs an elocutionist, indeed. How about Chester? Do you suppose he, too, has an impediment in his speech?"

"Chester, dear boy, is worse off than you are; he has been conditioned, as it were. That is, if he doesn't make up some of his failures in recitation, and straighten out some little affairs not connected with recitations, in a week's time, his governor is to be made to understand matters; and Chester thinks he has struck some pretty hard places. Now, honor bright, McKenzie, all nonsense aside, I'd help you through if I could; I'm a poor reader — that part is true enough, and I hate it, besides; but I'd go in, just to please you, if I hadn't got to help Chester out; that will take all of my spare time. I haven't much to boast of; things are looking a little skittish with me, too, since this old bore of a new professor has gotten hold of us; but I've promised to translate something for Chester, and — but, hold on; you and he might change work. It would be nothing but play for you to translate his Latin jargon — dictate it, you know — and he could read to you in return."

"No, thank you," said McKenzie, speaking very stiffly, "your memory is poor; I don't translate for people under such circumstances; I think I have mentioned it before. I can't even be bribed to do it."

Williston was preparing to depart by the time this sentence was concluded. His only answer was a laugh and a "Well, by-by, old fellow; keep a stiff upper lip; it will be all right a hundred years hence, you know. I always find that a comfort when I get into scrapes."

Rebecca heard a long-drawn sigh from the occupant of the next room when he was left alone. Had she known it was evolved by the thought that he seemed to have a worthless and somewhat disreputable class of friends to depend upon, it would have encouraged her. She had her bonnet on, ready for the street, but after some thoughtful moments she removed it, and had so far perfected her next plan of advance that by the time McKenzie had been helped by the bell-boy and the elevator-boy to a comfortable position in the boarders' sitting-room, which was, fortunately, on the same floor with his room, she was ready to call on him.

CHAPTER XXIV.

READING BETWEEN THE LINES.

“GOOD-MORNING,” she said, in her cheeriest tones ; “how are the maimed members this morning?” Then, hardly waiting a reply, “I have just been seized with what I hope is a bright idea. There is a chance for some leisure time being on my hands this morning. Professor Glyck has been telegraphed away for the day, so I cannot take my music lesson. Don’t you need to have something read to you? That used once to be a regular employment of mine.”

There was no mistaking the ring of satisfaction in his reply : “You are an angel of mercy, without doubt, Miss Meredith. I have been groaning in spirit all the morning, and, in fact, doing some of the groaning aloud, because I could not use my eyes. What have you to read to me?”

“That depends,” replied this wily schemer, in her most innocent tones. “What is your present mood? Is it safe to mention work to you?”

Some text book which you are sighing for? Or do you need to be amused? My experience with the species known as college students is that there is no accounting for their tastes; it may be a treatise on the Philosophy of the Will, or the latest novel, for which they are pining."

Certainly the way could not be more comfortably opened for that "detestable" review. In ten minutes they were at work. This proved to be the beginning of a very interesting two weeks; the sprained ankle making itself more troublesome than was at first expected. But it could not have been because its owner retarded its cure by chafing; he was almost content, even with partially bandaged eyes. Rebecca proved a most delightful reader; moreover, she was interested in the things she was reading, text books though they were, and asked questions in such an intelligent and thoroughly interested manner, that the college youth who was a good scholar, and had almost no friends with whom he could talk over his studies, enjoyed explaining to her fully as much as he enjoyed getting on in his work by her aid. Of course the explanations fixed the facts more firmly in his mind, and made his knowledge of them clearer. At first he was conscience-stricken at taking so much of his reader's time, and protested earnestly against the sacrifice; but Rebecca was so entirely willing to be sacrificed, and entered with such hearty enjoyment into the

work, that his protests grew fainter and fainter, especially as he saw what benefit he was deriving. Professor Glyck was dissatisfied, and grumbled, but he was a secondary consideration with this young woman, however much he might suppose himself first; the work for which she had actually come to this city was making great progress, and music could afford to wait. Occasionally there were other duties besides those of wetting the compresses for the eyes, rearranging the cushions for the ankle, and reading chapters on Chemistry, Rhetoric, Mental Science, and the like.

"Look here," was McKenzie's greeting one evening, "would you mind writing a line for me to my father? I never allow a week to pass without his hearing from me; and the rule is to write every two or three days. I am afraid he will be distressed if he doesn't get a letter to-morrow. If you wouldn't mind explaining that I have had a little tip up, or down, but am getting on famously, I'll be ever so much obliged. My father will know who you are; I have mentioned your name to him in my letters, and told him I enjoyed your music."

Rebecca was glad the speaker's eyes were bandaged; she knew her cheeks must fairly glow. Undoubtedly his father would know who she was; moreover, he knew in detail all about the accident, and just what the doctor said; but of course that was not to be even hinted at. Her writing mate-

rials were brought, and she meekly announced that she was ready for dictation. It would be a great deal better for him to tell her just what to say; but he demurred. He never could dictate; say what she pleased, only tell him not to be frightened. The ankle was doing famously, and the eyes were only being bandaged now to please the doctor; and, thanks to her, he was having a real jolly time. In a very few minutes the letter was ready to read aloud.

MR. DEANE MCKENZIE — DEAR SIR:

At the request of your son I write to inform you that he has had a slight accident. A misstep from a step-ladder in the laboratory where he was on duty caused him to sprain his ankle slightly; also, a jar of liquid was broken, and some of its contents spattered in his eyes. On this account he is at present unable to write, though the physician assures him that the eyes will be entirely well by next week; his ankle, also, is improving rapidly, and he bids me say that you are not to be in the least troubled about him. The person who is writing this can add her testimony to the above, she having heard the doctor say but this morning that eyes and ankle were doing well.

Yours respectfully,

R. L. MEREDITH.

The postscript she did not read to her patient; it was as follows:

"P. S. — You may have heard of 'R. L. Meredith' before; she is a maiden lady who is taking music lessons, and doing a little hospital nursing at the same time. She has the highest respect for step-ladders and chemical liquids, and is at this writing supremely happy. She may write another letter to-day, and may not have time, as a chapter in psychology awaits her."

What would her patient have thought of the postscript?

Of course, after so many favors given and received, these two could not go back to formalities when McKenzie was out again. Evidently he had no wish to do so; he frankly met all Rebecca's advances half-way. He enjoyed her music, and told her so; he mentioned favorites of his own, and was gratified with the fact that she promptly added them to her repertoire. It seemed to give him no uneasiness that there were some in the house who made a matter of amusement of the growing intimacy between himself and a woman so much his senior. He met good-natured hints in regard to it with the most good-natured indifference, and ruder thrusts he was not slow to repel with the haughtiness which they deserved.

"Are you going to take your old girl out to-night?" questioned one of the boarders who had a great desire to be on familiar terms with him.

"I beg your pardon," said McKenzie, drawing himself up to his full height, "did you speak to me?"

"I only asked if you were going to take anybody with you to the lecture to-night."

"Oh! I am going to ask Miss Meredith to go over with me, but I have not yet learned whether she will care to do so. Is there any reason why you particularly desire to know?"

The tone, rather than the words, conveyed to

the young man that he had been guilty of a rudeness, but he was too coarse-grained by nature to understand just wherein it lay.

However, the fact was that Rebecca, with a view to possible annoyances in this direction for her chosen young friend, made a special effort to be on cordial terms with other young people of the house, and succeeded to a degree that surprised herself. She found them, as a class, not difficult to win. A woman of intelligence and culture, older than themselves by a number of years, yet genially interested in all their pursuits, and willing to lend a helping hand on occasion — giving unselfishly of her time and skill, whether in the line of music or mending — was apparently a revelation to them. They grew to having a very hearty liking for her, and more than one university student said to McKenzie, "I tell you what it is, that Miss Meredith is first-class, isn't she? How well she made those games go the other night. And she never seems bored, no matter what a fellow wants."

By degrees Rebecca discovered that she was actually popular. It was an astonishing discovery. In her early girlhood she had been too much absorbed in her own pursuits and pleasures to note whether any beside the select few cared for her or not; later, she had conceived the idea that nobody cared for her; now she was learning that unselfish interest in others wins its way anywhere.

She wrote to Mr. McKenzie that it almost humiliated, and thoroughly frightened her, to think how large her influence was in the house.

It is true there were some young men who seemed to be always repelled by her. Of this class was Chester; he was not a boarder, but he affected McKenzie's society so much as to be often in the house. Rebecca gave some anxious hours to this fact, until she discovered that Chester, in the course of time, outwitted himself. Evidently he feared the "old maid's" influence over his friend, and exerted himself to counteract it to such an extent that he offended McKenzie by his rude allusions to her. This Rebecca surmised, rather than knew, by the fact that Chester came much less frequently than before, and that McKenzie was sharp in his denunciation of him, but refused to enter into particulars. Williston, however, continued to be on very intimate terms, and although Rebecca disliked him less than the other, she regretted the friendship. He was the only one who was guilty of bringing a cigar with him to McKenzie's room; and Rebecca wondered much why it was allowed, and could not help fearing that it would end in his joining him as a smoker. One evening she boldly spoke her views.

"It seems a pity that you who dislike the smell of tobacco, must be victimized with it in your room. Why are you so patient with that young man's unpleasant habits?"

He was standing beside her at the piano, turning the music for her. His face clouded instantly as he asked, "Do you get the odor of Williston's cigars in your room? I did not think of that. If they trouble you they shall not be endured."

"O, no! I was not thinking of myself. I am rarely in my room when he makes his call; it was the odor of tobacco about you, which reminded me of his habits. I thought it must be offensive to you."

"Why do you think so?"

"Because you do not use tobacco in any form; such people generally dislike its odor, do they not?"

"Apparently not," he said dryly; "if such were the case, would you ladies protest that so far from disliking it you really quite enjoy the odor of a good cigar? and even invite men to smoke in your presence?"

"Do many ladies of your acquaintance advance such views?"

"Not many, perhaps; but enough to prove my point. I know some ladies who are quite amused because some of their gentlemen acquaintances do not smoke. They make such the objects of their sharpest sallies; so that often a fellow is tempted to go to smoking, just to avoid the appearance of being singular."

Rebecca thought of the "Stover girls" and their cousin, and wondered whether they were

the ones to whom he referred; she concluded to risk a question.

"Mr. McKenzie, do many ladies whom you respect and honor conduct themselves in this way?"

"Look here; I thought you were to call me Carroll, for the sake of good fellowship?"

"Very well; then, Carroll, will you answer my question?"

"Why, as to that, I suppose I respect them. They are well enough in their way; they stand high enough in social circles, if that is what you mean — only I know you never mean that. I am not an ardent admirer of them, but I will confess that I am a good deal bored with trying to keep up a set of habits that are out of the usual line. Cigar smoke isn't particularly offensive to me, now that's a fact. I don't 'hanker' after it, but I don't have the horror of it that my father has, for instance, and that I fancy you have; and I can imagine myself getting fond of the stuff; which would be a great convenience to me as I am situated."

"Then I am glad that you are the sort of person you are."

"What sort of fellow am I?"

"The sort of 'fellow' who thinks more of his father's tastes and desires than of his own convenience; and one who might be made sport of forever without being turned from the road which he meant to travel."

The boy's face flushed with pleasure. "Thank you," he said; "you rate me high — much higher in one respect than I deserve. I tell you frankly, I have been on the very verge of learning to smoke, just to get rid of the banter. I wouldn't smoke in my father's presence, of course, nor anywhere indeed where it could annoy him; but if I had not sprained my ankle and fallen into your hands, figuratively speaking, I think I should have been comfortably puffing a cigar by this time, just for the sake of good fellowship."

"I'm so thankful for the sprained ankle! I shall have a deeper respect than ever for that step-ladder; but let me ask you, do you think it is your father's personal dislike to the odor of tobacco which makes him so anxious that you shall avoid the habit, or has he a deeper conviction in regard to it?"

"Oh! his convictions are deep enough. If I were to live in the middle of the Atlantic, and he on land, he would still want me not to 'touch, taste, nor handle.' He is extreme in his antipathy; but I can't say that I know why; and a fellow can't order his whole life to suit his father's notions, can he?"

"There are some things he might do, perhaps, for a good father, but I should hardly think he could be expected to give up so healthful, and agreeable, and refined a habit as puffing smoke into other people's faces, or into the curtains and

cushions of his own apartments; that would be too much to expect."

Carroll laughed good-humoredly. "Now don't be sarcastic with me," he said; "save that for Williston. You cut him up dreadfully to-night. Did you see him blush? But I tell you the ladies are largely to blame for the prevalence of the tobacco habit. I know fellows who would be willing enough to give it up, if certain girls whom they admire had strong convictions on the subject."

"That would be worth something, certainly; and I admit that the girls who have not have much to answer for. But why not let the fellows have strong convictions for themselves? Let us study up on the subject, Carroll, and see what we think, and why we think it. I know some books and papers which make very strong statements; if they are facts reasonable people need no other proofs on which to base convictions, and you and I ought to have brains enough to find out whether they are facts or not."

"All right," said Carroll heartily; "I'll go into it, and if I prove that the said 'facts' are a pack of sensation make-ups—as I dare say I can—why, I'll go to smoking pell-mell next week. You are not afraid to have me undertake it?"

"Not a bit."

But Mr. McKenzie senior, left alone in his desolate home, seemed to have time for all sorts of forebodings. He wrote some anxious letters to

Rebecca during these weeks. He heard much of her, he assured her; Carroll never wrote a letter nowadays without telling of some kindness of hers, and that he was grateful with a gratitude that words could not express, he knew she would understand; at the same time, his heart ached over his boy. He knew so well his easy-going temperament in some respects. His very friends among the students were chosen, not because he felt drawn toward them, but because they sought him out and would hang on to him, and he did not like to shake them off. His scholarship was excellent—in fact he had stood always among the first, yet his constant companions were scholars only in name. Carroll did not understand, the father said, that they followed him about because he had money and was careless in the use of it, but thought that they were actually attached to him, and by the very kindness of his heart he could be ruined. He was thinking of this more anxiously now, because reports very seriously against young Chester were constantly coming home, and it was a pain to him to have his son's name coupled with that young man's.

"In short," wrote the father, "if I could hear that my boy's feet were anchored on the Rock, then I should feel safe; for what he undertakes when roused and in earnest he accomplishes, and it would be no half-way work with him. I try to write to him about these things; but what can a

father say who, until his son was a man grown, gave no personal heed to the call of Christ? But for you, Rebecca, and your cry to him for me on that awful night, I should be an outsider still. Will you not ask the same mighty Christ to put his arms about my boy? I need not tell you how I pray for this. I know my boy would love Jesus Christ if he could be led to make his acquaintance. Last night I read the words, 'And Jesus, beholding him, loved him.' I could not help thinking he would say the same of my Carroll. O, Rebecca! I hope so much because of your influence in this direction."

Over this letter Rebecca shed some tears. It was so evident that the father put almost unbounded trust in her influence, and yet that he felt she was not pushing the claims of Jesus Christ as rapidly as she might. There were so many ways of influencing the boy which the father did not understand, and which she could not explain on paper. She knew that she was working for Christ; but she must be as wise as a serpent in fishing for this soul.

CHAPTER XXV.

INVITATIONS.

PERHAPS, after all, this winter which for certain reasons was expected to seem long, passed quite as rapidly as any which had preceded it. For one reason, most of the persons concerned were very busy. Certainly Rebecca Meredith found that hands and heart were almost more than full. What with her music, and her friendships, and her church work, and her semi-weekly correspondence, to say nothing of her many letters to Lilian, every hour had its duties. To undertake to be friend and confidante, and, in a degree, caretaker for a house full of young people, was found to require no small amount of planning, as well as the quiet giving up of some plans which had been dear to her own heart. Moreover, as has been hinted, the church claimed this belated worker for a fair share of its responsibilities. It is possible that she may have been even more eager to do her share because she

realized so forcibly, at times, the wasted years. Certain it is that the young men in her Bible class, and the young women in her Tuesday evening class, found in her a faithful and persistent friend and helper. One bit of work dear to her heart grew out of her having met accidentally on the street, one day, none other than Nancy, the former chambermaid at Carroll Place.

"Bless us and save us!" exclaimed that young woman, in a voice much too loud for the street, "if here ain't Rebecca herself, as large as life. Ain't it queer now, that I should meet you in this great big city? Be you living here? Where? Bless us and save us! If I didn't think you'd stick by Miss Lilian; and I wish to goodness I had. He was awful stuck up, and particular, and grand; but he was enough sight better to work for than any I have found since. Say, do you know where Miss Lilian is?"

Rebecca made what explanation was necessary, and Nancy commented.

"My! in the country this time of year?" Nancy evidently looked upon the country as a howling wilderness of ice and snow, without one redeeming feature, but the voice was very tender in which she said: "Poor little dear! I'd give all my month's wages to see her for an hour. I tell you, Rebecca, I've got an awful place. Sometimes I think I won't stand it another hour; and then again I think, what's the use? Maybe I shouldn't

better myself if I should change; but I couldn't do much worse. There ain't no hope of my being wanted where Miss Lillian is, I s'pose? Land, yes! I'd go to the country quick enough for the sake of seeing her."

It was Rebecca's turn to question. Yes, Nancy's "place" was hard enough. It did not seem strange, when one heard a description of the dark basement corner which was called her room, that she was tempted to spend her evenings on the streets, or at the lowest variety theaters—anywhere where there was light and warmth, and some sort of companionship. Up to this point, Rebecca had felt only dismay at the thought of possible embarrassments connected with Nancy; now she forgot herself, and began to consider how it was possible to save Nancy from the almost certain ruin which waited at street corners for such as she.

It was not much that she could do, she told herself; but the interview made her ready, even eager, to help push an enterprise which was started but a few days afterwards in the church which she attended. This was the opening of branch Young Woman's Christian Association Rooms in that very portion of the city where Nancy at present made her home; and Nancy, being really attached to Rebecca, was induced to go there for several evenings in succession; to go, indeed, until she became so interested in learning how to make

a dress for herself, as to need no other inducement. The truth is, Nancy was honestly fond of respectability. Nor did the embarrassments which Rebecca had feared because of her ever come in as a disturbing element.

"What be you doing?" she had asked, in the early days of this renewed acquaintance. And on being informed she had opened her eyes very wide, asked several other questions, and finally, after a minute's silence, burst forth with, "You ain't like one of us; I always said so: I told Mrs. Barnett once, that you wasn't any more a nurse-girl than I was the queen; but whatever you was humbugging around for, I'll always say you did it well. Miss Lilian was took care of as she never was before."

"There was no mystery about it, Nancy," Rebecca answered quietly. "My father lost some money, and I wanted to help him. I went to the city expecting to do other work, but it failed me, and I became nurse girl, for the time, because I knew I could be faithful, and earn a respectable living; now the need for it has passed by."

"My eyes!" was Nancy's comment, "there's lots of folks that wouldn't 'a' done it."

After that she kept her own counsel, and further demonstrated her superiority over many by addressing Rebecca, after a few weeks of experience in the newly opened rooms, as "Miss Meredith." Oh! there were lessons which might

have been learned even of Nancy. It interested Rebecca to note how many of those she essayed to help became in process of time her teachers. There, for instance, was Carroll McKenzie.

"You asked me once what made me tolerate Williston and his cigar in my room," he said to her, "and I did not answer. What would you say if I told you there was a reason which was not born of indolence or indifference? The fact is, Miss Meredith, when Williston is smoking in my room he isn't smoking anywhere else; don't you see? And there are worse places than that to be found, without much hunting. Look here, don't you think you are rather hard on Williston? I tell you the fellow is worth a kind word now and then; he has none too many of them. His mother is a fashionable woman who would rather caress a lap-dog than write to her son, any day; and his father is a step-father, who married his mother because he liked her bank account. Poor Williston hasn't the least idea what a real father can be. He is not popular in college; the only one who is uniformly good-natured to him is Chester, and perhaps you can surmise that Chester's influence isn't as angelic as it might be. If I were you, and knew how to be good to as many people as you do, I'd save a little bit of it for poor fellows like Williston."

Rebecca listened, conscience-stricken as well as amused. There were touches of the divine, it

seemed, about Carroll which his father did not suspect. After that she set herself to win the friendship of Williston.

In all these ways the winter hastened. There was one delightful break in its routine. Rebecca went home during the holidays for a flying visit, and Mr. McKenzie chose the same time to make his visit to Lilian.

At first these two puzzled much as to how they would plan for Carroll's Christmas; but suddenly one of the professors, a young man who knew neither of them, came to the rescue. Carroll was invited to accompany him to his father's house for the holidays, with the promise of being able to examine certain rare books in a very choice library. This was an opportunity by no means to be slighted, and both Rebecca's and Mr. McKenzie's advice that the invitation be accepted with thanks was hearty in the extreme.

Mr. McKenzie was back at his own home for New Year's, and Carroll spent that day and the three following with him; but early in the new year the two boarders were back in their rooms at work.

Rebecca had by no means forgotten the father's appeal that she would try to help the feet of his son to rest upon the Rock. As a matter of fact, it was for this that she prayed and watched unceasingly; but as yet there had been no very encouraging indications. Carroll, who was frank

and genial on every other subject, was reserved almost to coldness whenever she ventured to mention religious themes. He attended church quite regularly on Sabbath mornings, and occasionally went with her in the evenings; but he assured her that he did it only to please her, and felt that he would be more profitably employed in his room, getting ready for the next day's recitations. He also admitted that his regular attendance in the morning was out of respect to his father's wishes and example. For the rest, he evaded all her efforts to understand him more fully. Yet he made no attempt to pose as a skeptic.

"Of course I have an intellectual belief in all these things," he said once, in answer to some question of hers; "no history is better authenticated than the so-called religious history. It requires a greater stretch of credulity to account for things in general on some other basis than it does to accept your and my father's theories."

"But, Carroll," she said, "isn't it a strange position for an intelligent young man to take, to accept theories which drive you to certain conclusions, and then live as though you discarded them?"

"Ah! now don't let us go to arguing about that," was his careless rejoinder; "I assure you it will do no good. I don't pretend to be consistent—very few people are—all I am sure of is, that I don't want to hear anything about it. Please let us speak of something else."

Much she puzzled over it, wondering what could be in his way, and why he would not at least talk frankly with her, and great was her disappointment in the thought that on this most important of all themes she was evidently making no progress.

It was in March, toward the middle of the month, that a new element of power came into Rebecca's life. In the church which she had chosen on her first arrival in the city, a series of evangelistic meetings were commenced, under the charge of a stranger, and Rebecca, who had had no experience in such meetings, was from the first very powerfully attracted. Indeed, her Christian life received during those three weeks an uplift which went with her through all the after years. She was regular in her attendance at the meetings, denying herself the pleasure of several fine concerts and lectures in order to do so; at least, it looked like self-denial to Carroll McKenzie. He was, perhaps, more nearly vexed with her about this matter than he ever was over anything else.

"Do you really mean me to understand that you prefer that man's effusion to the finest oratorio we have had this season?" he asked half-angrily.

"It is not fair in you to speak of the preacher in that tone, Carroll, when you will not go to hear any of his 'effusions'; and you do not need to be told, I trust, that some people go to church for other reasons than to hear any man."

But Carroll was unquestionably vexed, and went away letting her feel that he was. She went to the meeting with a sore heart, but among those who arose that night to signify their desire to become Christians was Nancy, with her face aglow, and all her soul in her eyes; and Rebecca was comforted. Carroll, however, felt the stings of remorse over his treatment of her to such a degree that on the next evening he came to her in his most genial mood.

"I have news for you which, to judge from your present infatuation, will put you into the seventh heaven of satisfaction," he said. "What do you say to Williston and myself going to church with you this evening? Think of two such trophies at one time! Will it not be too much?"

Rebecca was not greatly elated over their going. She divined the reason upon Carroll's part, at least, and believed that Williston went to get what amusement he could out of it, and that his presence would have a demoralizing effect upon Carroll. It was all much as she had feared. Could she have chosen from all the sermons which she had heard from the evangelist, this would have been the last she would have selected for Carroll to hear; it was good, but commonplace. Several times in the course of its delivery she could see Carroll's eyes dance over some slip in grammar, or logic. The speaker was an educated man, but under the pressure of extempore

utterance, like many other public speakers, he made grammatical slips; and Carroll who would have scorned on ordinary occasions to ridicule him for this, was in the mood to notice it. It was worse when the formal service was concluded. Rebecca found herself hoping that Carroll and his companion would depart, with the uninterested crowds, but apparently they had no such intention; they settled themselves, prepared to be amused with whatever followed. It suited the leader that evening to ask people forward for prayers, and to ask, also, that Christian workers would move down the aisles, repeating the invitation. Meantime, there was much singing interspersed with earnest exhortations, some of them more earnest than otherwise, at least, in the estimation of those not deeply interested. Rebecca, watching Carroll's face, could see that its amused look gradually changed to one of annoyance; while Williston continued to be mightily pleased with the entire scene. Presently, down the aisle came an elderly, plain-looking man, speaking right and left to whoever he chanced to see. A good man he was, but not one who would have been called wise in his manner of trying to win souls. How earnestly Rebecca hoped, even prayed, that he would pass Carroll unnoticed. But he did not.

"Young man," he said, touching Carroll's arm, which was thrown across the end of the seat, "have you made your peace with God?"

No reply. Only a fixed, haughty stare, as of one who, but for the proprieties of the place, would have said, "What is that to you? Attend to your own affairs." As for Williston, he shook the seat with laughter.

The stranger waited a moment, then made a second effort. "Won't you come up to the front, and let us pray for you?"

"No, I will not; I have no desire to have you pray for me."

Williston laughed outright. The elderly man seemed surprised and dismayed; he moved on quickly, and Carroll sat erect, his eyes blazing. However, very many accepted the invitation, and the meeting was undoubtedly one of great power. Through it all, Rebecca sat with her heart feeling like lead. She could not, just then, rejoice over the great harvest; she could not join with the workers in their closing jubilate: "Bringing in the sheaves."

All she could think of was that poor, proud sheaf, who sat erect with folded arms and haughty face, refusing to be garnered.

In the large parlor at home there was a babel of tongues as soon as they entered; in fact, several of the boarders had joined them for the homeward walk. So general had become the interest in that part of the city, that large numbers of the boarders were generally present at the evening meetings. On this particular night the spirit of criticism was

in the air, voiced principally by those who called themselves Christians.

"Such an excitement!" they said. "So unfortunate! There must have been many sensible persons who were repelled from the whole thing." "That was the way with these traveling revivalists; they never knew when to stop." "What if there were crowds pushing forward? What would it all amount to? Mere animal excitement in the majority of cases, no doubt." "Oh! very probably some of the ignorant were in earnest, but it was a pity for a cultured audience to have to endure such personalities."

Rebecca felt weary of them all. She had promised to wait in the boarders' sitting-room for a messenger from the Association rooms, who was to bring her word that night about a member who was ill, and to take her some little comforts, so thither she escaped as soon as she could, with a bow for Carroll as she passed him. But he followed her to the parlor, upstairs. It was vacant, and he began the moment he closed the door.

"Now, Miss Meredith, go ahead; you are vexed with me; you think I disgraced myself to-night, and you long to tell me so. I am ready, and would rather have it out than not."

"I have nothing to say," replied Rebecca coldly. "If your conscience exonerates you for the position you took to-night, you certainly have no cause to care what others think of you."

"But I do care, and you know that I do. I say it was insufferable in that man to stop and ask me insulting questions to-night before all the people about me, and to set Williston into almost a shout of laughter. Do you justify him in any such proceeding?"

"I shall not undertake to 'justify' him, as you call it. He may have chosen an unfortunate person to invite to Christ, and he may not have known how to give the invitation as well as some might. But if I were you, and believed, as you say you do, in Jesus Christ, I do not think I would quarrel with the servant who came to remind me that he was waiting to give me an audience, no matter how crudely put the servant's word might be. It hardly seems like you to attach so much importance to trifles, and to trifle with the important. In point of fact, you know the man did not mean to insult you—did not mean anything but the utmost kindness."

Carroll's mood seemed to change suddenly.

"I know it," he said. "Hang it all, Miss Meredith! I am ashamed of myself, and I might as well own it; I don't know what possessed me to be such a bear. I had not the slightest intention of saying anything disagreeable. I think it was that everlasting giggling which Williston kept up which angered me; I thought the effect on him would be anything but helpful. The whole thing, you see, was calculated to offend the taste of peo-

ple of refinement. The very singing was offensive, and the words mere doggerel, some of them. As for all those people surging down the aisle, what good did it do them? The most of them were too much excited to know what they were about. It is the offensive part of the whole thing to which I object, Miss Meredith, you must know that, and not to the thing itself. The man was as illogical some of the time as he well could be, but I presume he is in earnest. All I say is, that it is most unfortunate that he should allow himself and his audience to be led into such a whirl of excitement that they don't know what they are about. Religion, if it is anything, is a serious matter, and ought to be considered quietly and dispassionately."

Rebecca was very tired, and very much disappointed. She had, it may as well be confessed, lost all hope of Carroll's being influenced at this time to acknowledge the claims of Christ, so that in what she said next she was influenced solely by the desire to let Carroll see how fully she understood the weakness of his apologies and excuses.

CHAPTER XXVI.

LOGICAL CONCLUSIONS.

“CARROLL,” she said, speaking very quietly and wearily, “do you know I think that Williston would not have laughed so immoderately to-night if he had not thought he was pleasing you. I believe you have yourself to thank for whatever harm results from his presence at the meeting. He is a weaker man than you in every way, yet you let him influence you to your injury, and you in turn injure him. But never mind that. You have talked about illogical people to-night, do let me remind you how illogical you are yourself. You object to the excitement there was ; I did not see any display of feeling which did not seem to me quite natural and reasonable, when one considered the momentousness of the subject, and the length of time which it had been neglected ; but you objected ; you think religion ought to be considered quietly and dispassionately ; you think it is a matter of judgment, and not of feeling.

Now let me ask you, Why, do you suppose, did not those people take it into consideration in the quietness of the months which have passed, before these meetings began? You have seen nothing like excitement heretofore, have you? No; please don't interrupt me, I heard you through quietly; I want to be still more 'logical' than that; I want to ask you why you suppose it is that you have not quietly and dispassionately considered this thing and settled it? Why you do not do so to-night, for instance, now and here? This room is quiet enough, and neither you nor I are excited; and you do not need to wait for feeling, for religion, 'if it is anything, is not a matter of feeling, but of judgment;' and your judgment has been convinced for years — so you have told me. Now will you tell me why, instead of venting your indignation on an old man who asked you to begin to-night to serve Christ, you do not quietly and dispassionately do it?"

The young man had given over all attempt to interrupt her, although for a moment he had been eager to do so. He was looking steadily at her while she spoke; when she ceased he turned from her and began to walk up and down the room; not excitedly, but with slow, thoughtful footsteps. She, meantime, was wondering now that the excitement of her first feeling was passing, whether by yielding to her desire to speak some plain truths, she had not done harm, instead of good.

The silence lasted but a few minutes, then he came over to her.

"Miss Meredith, you do not think that I will accept your invitation to begin to-night to serve Christ; in fact, it was hardly an invitation, but a question which you thought I could not answer. What you wished, was to show me the folly of my position. I realize it, in part, at least; but I am going to surprise you. I mean to do it. This very night, here, in this room, now, I mean to go on my knees to God and ask him to accept me. And I am not doing it because I am excited or because my feelings are enlisted."

If he were not excited, his listener was; so utterly unexpected was this thing for which she had been praying all winter, that she could not even hope it was sincere.

"Carroll," she said, her face pale with fear, "surely you would not make a mock of such a sacred thing!"

"Miss Meredith, do you believe my father's son would make a mock of anything which deserved respect? I was never more in earnest in my life; and I haven't a particle of feeling in the matter. That is, I have no desire to serve God; I have simply the conviction that for a fellow who believes what I do, it is the logical step to take, and I am going to take it. And, Miss Meredith, you may not know it, but there is one curious thing about me, careless fellow as all my friends con-

sider me ; when I absolutely make up my mind to a thing I stand by it. Now I am ready. Will you kneel with me ?"

It was beyond belief. Even when Rebecca was on her knees, listening to his words which were calm and deliberate ; an unreserved surrender of himself to the service of Christ — her bewildered brain refused to take in the magnitude of the experience. When he evidently waited for her to pray, she could only repeat the petition which she had been offering for him so long, that he might be brought to see his need of Christ. There was not a word of thanksgiving in it.

Just as they arose from their knees, some one knocked at the door, and the messenger for whom Rebecca had been waiting appeared.

"Good-night," said Carroll, and left her at once.

All through the following day Rebecca, though outwardly at work as usual, was in reality going over the remarkable scenes of the evening before. Could it be possible that Carroll McKenzie had settled the momentous question which he had seemed so far from settling but a half-hour before ? She recalled the haughty, even angry words which he had spoken to that old man, and her heart failed her ; surely such was not the spirit of one near to the kingdom. They had missed each other in the morning, and Rebecca was detained at dinner-time, and came late only to find as she had expected, that Carroll had dined some time

before. But just as she was leaving the house for the evening service, he came springing down the steps.

"Were you going without me?" he asked her brightly. "Where have you been all day? I took an early breakfast as there was a matter which I wanted to attend to before college, but you were invisible both at luncheon and dinner. Halloo, Williston! were you going to my room? Come with us to church."

"You don't say you are going to church again!" exclaimed that young man, in real or affected surprise. They met him just as they reached the sidewalk. Carroll linked his arm in Williston's and the two walked on together, the former talking earnestly, while Rebecca dropped behind with some of the boarders. Arrived at church, Carroll evidently made an effort to be seated beside Rebecca, and succeeded. His face was bright, and he gave the most serious attention to the sermon, which was much stronger than the one of the previous night. In the after service the same method was employed which had so jarred Carroll, and the same old man came, presently, down the aisle. He seemed to recognize Carroll, for although he looked steadily at him he was passing without a word when that young man deliberately arose, whispered a few words in his ear, then walked down the aisle beside him, the old man's face radiant the while.

"You look as though you thought I was incomprehensible!" Carroll said to Rebecca, as they filed out of church. "Let me walk along with you and explain. Williston is talking with Miss Andrews. Why, you see, it is like this: I was, as I told you last evening, in solemn earnest. To make a long story into a short one, I have been fighting this thing for a year. Father used to talk with me a good deal last winter, but I did not think I wanted to have anything to do with religion. To be entirely frank with you, I thought it ought to have made my mother a happier woman than it did; she was the sweetest mother! yet her religion never made her happy; she used to cry over it. Sometime, Miss Meredith, I will tell you about my mother."

"O, sometime!" thought Rebecca, "I will tell you about your mother, and what religion did for her last months on earth."

Carroll went on eagerly: "I think I was almost resentful over it, and rebellious. I know I have resisted all personal efforts for years; and during this past year I have had more calls to the service, I think, than in all my previous life. Last evening something in that man's sermon got hold of me; I am sure I don't know how, or why. It was illogical, Miss Meredith, though you did not like my saying so; some of the points made were very weak, yet the intense earnestness of the man, and the fact that despite his evident want of mental

grasp of his subject, it was powerful in his hands, moved me strangely; not in the line of my feeling, you understand, but my intellect. It made me realize somehow as never before, that God was behind this thing, and that he was calling me, and that I was a fool to resist his reasonable service when I admitted that it was reasonable, and that only. My very anger with that old gentleman helped to convince me that I was a fool. I was quarreling with him for urging me to do that which I knew I ought to do, and which sometime I really meant to do. To make me appear less idiotic, I hid behind the excitement dodge, although my common sense told me that the subject, even as I understood it, was more worthy of rousing excitement than most things which we consider it good form to rave over. Your bit of logic in that line made a climax. Suddenly, while you stood there looking utterly dissatisfied with me, I rose to the privileges of my common sense. I said 'This thing is right, and I know it; and I shall surrender.' Well, I did, with as much sincerity as I ever did anything in my life. But that wasn't the end of it. I went to my room resolved to live by principle, and pay no attention to feeling; but I assure you, Miss Meredith, I had feeling enough before the night was over. I have had a very happy day, but part of the night was miserable. I think the question was settled when I knelt there with you, but I know a good deal

more about it than I did last night. As for my dear old man I knew before morning that I should ask him to forgive me, though I did not think then of going forward with him this evening; but when it occurred to me to-night I found that I quite liked to do it; I had not the slightest objection to walking down the aisle with him, and asking the people to pray for me. Last night I hated it, to-night it seemed a privilege. Perhaps you understand something about such sudden changes; I confess I did not. And now, Miss Meredith, I have talked enough about myself; I want to speak of something of much more importance. Will you join me in praying for and working for Williston? He is not so bad a fellow as some think; but he is weak, and—O, well! he needs Christ; the fact is, he must have him, or he is lost."

That was the beginning of very precious weeks. Carroll had understood himself well when he said if he made up his mind to a thing he "stood by it." No more earnest worker for his recently chosen Leader could have been found; and among the college students, especially, he was a power. Before the special meetings closed, large numbers from the university had enlisted for life in Christ's service, and among them was Williston, the weak and wavering—the tool in the hands of that keen-brained young scamp, Chester. A great deal of help and a great deal of forbearance would Will-

ton need, but yet it was apparent, after a few weeks, that the mighty Christ had indeed gotten hold of him.

"He has no backbone," explained Carroll; "but if he will only lean on the right One, even that will be all right."

And in the course of time it became apparent that God could make not only "the wrath of man" but the weakness of man "to praise him."

Meantime, spring was coming with rapid strides. They were well into April now, and June was not far away. Mr. McKenzie was growing restive under his many restrictions.

"The fact is," he wrote to Rebecca, "I feel like a hypocrite whenever I write to my boy. He pours out his whole heart to me, and a fair share of it is filled with you, and when I respond I have to confine myself to the merest commonplaces or to total silence, so far as one theme is concerned; and, in short, have you not more than gained your point? Isn't it time to confess?"

And Rebecca, who began to realize that there would be a good deal to confess, admitted that perhaps the time had come to begin; but she had her own plan of operations, and held him strictly to it. If he thought it wise he might now tell Carroll of his future intentions, but on no account was he to mention the lady's name or place of abode. That followed which she had hoped and believed would. Carroll had many friends, but

few confidantes; she believed herself to be his chiefest, and so it proved.

At the dinner-table one evening her heart ached for the boy. it was so evident to her that he had received a blow of some sort. He was much quieter than usual, though quite as thoughtful of others, and he paid almost no attention to the various subjects of conversation, some of which would naturally have interested him.

"What are you going to do this evening?" he asked Rebecca before she left the table. He had come around to her side to speak to her.

"Nothing," she said promptly, mentally laying aside two possible engagements as he spoke.

"Then may I have a little visit with you in a small reception-room, quite alone? I want to talk with you a little about — well, about myself."

And then Rebecca felt in her guilty soul that he had had a letter from his father.

She made the little reception-room, which was held for the convenience of boarders who wished to see their friends with a reasonable degree of privacy, as bright as she could, placing the spring violets which Carroll had given her in a vase beside her, and then sat down with her bit of lace work to wait. There was not long waiting. Carroll came promptly at the hour named.

"I think I have what the girls call the blues," he said, smiling, "and it seemed natural, some way, to rush to you for comfort."

"I am glad of that. Am I to know what causes them?"

"I suppose so. Selfishness is, without doubt, at the root."

"That surprises me; I have never thought it one of your besetments."

"Ah! you don't know me. I can be very selfish over my friends. I have only a very few—hosts of acquaintances, and friends in a way, but extremely few who belong to the inner circle. I'm going to dash right into the middle of it, Miss Meredith; I never was a fellow who could wait around on the outside of a thing. My father is going to marry again. There! now you know the whole."

Rebecca put a very crooked stitch in her lace work, but her voice was quiet.

"Well, and you do not like the woman he has chosen? Is that what I am expected to understand? If so, ought I not to know why you object to her?"

Carroll made a movement of impatience. "I don't know the woman's name, nor where she lives, nor the first thing about her," he said passionately; "and I don't want to. Haven't I a right to object to every woman on earth under such circumstances?"

"I don't believe I see why."

"Would you like a woman to come into your home and take your mother's place?"

"There is one in my home, the dearest woman friend I have in this world. I could not, if I were to try, tell you all she has been, and is, to me."

"O, well!" he said, "then I am mistaken; you will not understand me," and he spoke like one who resented her position as a personal injury.

"Yes," she said quietly, "I think perhaps I am the very one to understand; for I must tell you that I resented the gift as an intrusion, and would have none of the comfort of it for years. I made my own life and that of others miserable because of it, and only after years learned my grave mistake."

"Oh!" he said again; then he laughed a little, and added that he believed he sympathized with her first condition more than he did with the last. When she asked him how a Christian young man could have such a belief, he burst forth again.

"I don't think you know anything about it. I have been a great deal to my father—at least I thought I was—and now to have a stranger come between us"—

"Carroll, cannot young men be a great deal to their fathers even when they have mothers living?"

"Miss Meredith, you know that is a different thing."

"Yes, I know it is; but I want you to remember that your father is not putting you, his son, away, and taking another son; he is entering upon an entirely different relation."

"I was satisfied with the present state of things," said Carroll gloomily.

"Just now you are ; but may I ask if you suppose you would always be? Was it your intention to give yourself utterly and for life to your father never to marry, never to enter into any business which would take you away from him and his home, never to travel to any extent without him? In short, to give yourself up to him and his plans utterly and forever?"

Carroll looked half-wonderingly at her, and laughed.

"What do you mean?" he asked. "Is that your idea of a son's duty?"

"No, not in the usual order of things ; but it is accepted as a wife's duty, as a matter of course, and if you are really satisfied with your father for a life companion, and demand nothing else in life but his love, and care, and society, why, you ought to be ready to meet the ordinary conditions, ought you not?"

"Do you suppose my father is lonely?"

"Why should he not be? Was there ever a wife who went away from her husband for a term of years, and planned to be away from him more or less through the long future, as you have done, and in the nature of things must do? Do you not see, Carroll, that both you and I were trying to make our father's fill other relations to us than those of father and child? I know all about it,

for I have done it. And I know, also, that my second mother is not only my father's helper and comforter in my absence, but, as I told you, the best woman friend I have."

He changed his base suddenly.

"Miss Meredith, I have not been strictly honest with you. Occasionally I have thought of the possibility of my father marrying again, and have tried to make myself feel willing to harbor the thought, and under some circumstances I could do so. You will laugh at me now, but I am going to tell the whole. When it dawned upon me that he was a comparatively young man, and that my little sister was a mere child, and that he might of necessity be much separated not only from me, but from her, I said to myself if he would only let me choose for him, I could show him a woman who would be all that any sane man could desire. In short, Miss Meredith, it is all up now, but at the risk of being laughed at, I am going to confess that I have plotted and schemed for it, and failed. I have begged my father again and again to come here for a visit ; I had it in my heart to introduce you two, and it did seem to me that the eternal fitness of things ought to do the rest. But I could never prevail upon him to come, and now it is too late."

CHAPTER XXVII.

WANTED AT HOME.

REBECCA'S cheeks were the color of carnations; but she struggled to laugh, as was expected of her, rather than to give way to tears.

"You dear boy! don't you know you would have hated me if any such thing had happened?"

"I should have adored you! O, Miss Meredith! think what it might have been to have actually belonged to you; to have felt, when I was away from my father, that he was not desolate, because you were with him; to have thought of my little sister as having such love and care as you would have given her. Oh! it is too, too bad."

He actually arose and tramped up and down the little room in his intense excitement. This was almost too much for Rebecca's nerves. No such remarkable scheming on the part of the boy had been planned for. It would not do to laugh even hysterically too long, and it would be

supremely ridiculous to cry. By degrees Carroll's excitement calmed. He was helped by the thought that it was ungentlemanly to force his own troubles long upon an outsider.

"I beg your pardon," he said, coming presently back to his seat near her, "I do not intend to be a fool, if I can help it; but this thing came upon me suddenly, and I am all broken up. I had an idea that my father was absorbed in business, and had not given thought to such matters; and now to find everything settled, and me not apparently considered."

It was hard, this part of it. Rebecca felt it for him; felt all but ashamed of herself for having planned it, and was, therefore, prepared to be very sympathetic.

This was the first of many talks. Carroll having, under the impulse of his first surprise and pain, gone to her with what he called "the whole story," felt at liberty to think aloud in her presence as much as he would. And very fortunate was it for him that he had chosen such a friend to think before. The very experience through which she had been helped her wonderfully in understanding him; and she was interested to note what little difference there was, after all, in hearts. Gradually he grew reconciled to the new state of things, or, as he heroically expressed it, made up his mind to "make the best of what could not be helped," and even inter-

ested himself in speculating as to the age and personal appearance of his father's choice. That the stranger was his father's choice, was a stronghold which Rebecca took great pains to keep before the boy. It ought to be such a steady support and comfort to him to remember that his father could not but choose wisely.

Occasionally, however, after some of her best efforts, the boy would turn away from her with something like a groan, and an outburst which began with, "Oh! if he only" — and then would suddenly stop. At such times there was a sweet pain in Rebecca's heart; the pain was for the poor boy, whom she loved almost with a mother's yearning, and the sweetness was because she felt assured that the completed sentence would have been, "Oh! if he only had chosen you."

But Mr. McKenzie, far away from these experiences, was growing restive to an alarming degree. He really owed it to the boy to accept one of his many invitations and spend a day or two with him. He had not been so long without visiting him since Carroll first went away from home, when he was almost a little boy; and there was no reason now why all secrecy should not come to an end. So Rebecca, who had thought with no little anxiety about the best way of acquainting Carroll with the truth, prepared to carry out the last part of her programme. She had one musical friend, a resident in the city, with whom she

would have spent much time, had she not been so closely employed otherwise. This friend was intimate enough to be taken into confidence, and allowed to assist in the final scene.

Accordingly, the young woman was better prepared than Carroll could have imagined possible, for his air of suppressed excitement when he told her one evening at the dinner-table, that he must see her for a few minutes as soon as possible.

Yes, he had great news ; his father was coming to see him, at last ; was coming to-morrow. But there was more than that. What did Miss Meredith think ? She was actually in this city, spending the time with a friend out at Hampton Park, and his father wanted him to go on that very first evening and call upon her.

Truth to tell, Carroll, who had before this made many promises about good behavior, was much dismayed at the thought of the approaching ordeal. His father might have spent the first evening with him, he declared, in his unreasonableness ; "Or he might have gone alone to call upon her, and let him do it some other time." It took all Rebecca's influence to reason him into admitting his unreasonableness ; and at the last he well-nigh upset everything by suddenly insisting that she join them and make the acquaintance of the stranger. He had as good a right to have a stranger friend as his father had, he grumbled, "and to take her along, if he wanted to." But he laughed at Re-

becca's utterly dismayed face, and assured her that he wasn't quite an idiot, although he knew he acted like one. Still, he was genuinely annoyed when he learned that Rebecca would not be at home the next day; she was going out to make a long-promised visit to a friend. He wanted her especially, he said. In the first place, he wanted his father to see her, "and be filled with regrets" — this last in the serio-comic tone which he could affect on occasion — but above all he needed her to "strengthen him up" for the ordeal. "I know I shall hate her, in spite of all my resolutions," was his last doleful comment.

As for Rebecca's part in the day's preparations, they may, perhaps, be imagined. Her friend lived in one of the handsome suburbs, in a pretty home furnished with quiet, refined taste. On this particular evening she was quite alone, her father having a business engagement that would keep him late, and her brothers being out of town. The back parlor had been given over to Rebecca's use, and here she, in the prettiest dress her slender purse could manage, and her dainty taste evolve, sat waiting for calls.

"Miss Meredith expects some friends to call upon her," had been the word to the servant. "If I am not down when they arrive, take them directly to the back parlor; she will be there to receive them."

So, in process of time, two cards were brought

to Rebecca — "Mr. Deane McKenzie," and "Mr. Carroll McKenzie" — the gentlemen following their cards so promptly that the servant hardly had time to announce them. At least Mr. McKenzie was prompt. Carroll lingered a moment, ostensibly to look at a picture in the front parlor as his father passed behind the portière, but really to give the father a chance to greet his friend. A moment more, and he heard his name. "I want to present to you my son Carroll." And Carroll came swiftly from the front room, that his father might not be embarrassed by his tardiness, and stood face to face with — Rebecca.

For a single instant he stood as if transfixed; then, his quick brain taking in enough of the situation, he cried out, "O, my dearest!" and was at her side, clasping her hands, kissing them, laughing over them, all but crying over them, in his intense excitement and joy.

"Really!" said Mr. McKenzie, as he looked on, half-astonished and wholly touched, until the amusing side of the picture began to press upon him; "I thought I was to introduce you two; it looks the rather as though somebody was needed to introduce me."

The only other event of special interest which occurred that spring was the fact that Nancy went to Dr. Meredith's as second girl, and general helper. Nancy, whom the religion of Jesus Christ

had transformed ; of whom Mr. McKenzie said the very "fashion of her countenance" was altered. Nancy, who had such a debt of gratitude to pay to Rebecca that she would have gladly gone daily down on her knees to serve her, and who, hearing with whom Miss Lilian was staying, began to long exceedingly, since she could not serve Rebecca, to serve some of her friends. A treasure she proved to Mrs. Meredith, who, in view of her small charge, and of the events of the coming June, had her hands very full. The first of May Rebecca went home herself, her second term of lessons with Professor Glyck being completed. Circumstances were such that she was obliged positively to refuse to play at his concert in June, whereat he was aggrieved, and considered her somewhat ungrateful, after all the extra care he had bestowed upon her, and the pride he had taken in her, until he received those long-delayed cards : "Dr. and Mrs. John Ellis Meredith request the pleasure," etc., then he understood. But before that date many details had been arranged.

"Is Nancy to make one of our household?" wrote Mr. McKenzie. "I have quite a long and very well executed letter from her, begging me to intercede to that effect. Lilian seems to be fond of her ; but of course I leave all such matters to you. I do not even know whether you like to retain Mrs. Barnett. She, also, is begging that I will learn, if possible, whether her services will be

agreeable ; and she signifies her own hearty pleasure in view of such a possibility. If you care to send her a word, please do so ; or, if you prefer to leave all these details until we are fairly settled, of course you will do that."

Then Rebecca gave herself time to think of some of the startling contrasts in her life ; tried to imagine herself at Carroll Place, with Mrs. Barnett bowing to her and waiting for orders, and Nancy speaking of her as "the Missis !" though Nancy was learning in these days to use the language which belongs to good breeding. The prospective mistress decided that some things must be left until she had learned how to adjust herself to new environments ; but for the present she would as soon have thought of dismissing herself, as Mrs. Barnett ; and she made Nancy's cheeks red for the day by telling her that the dress she was wearing would do nicely for mornings, at Carroll Place.

It was a perfect June day when Rebecca took her next journey under the care of Mr. Deane McKenzie. This time he gave her openly and constantly the most thoughtful attention and care ; and the contrast between this and that other journey which she had taken to the same city, when alone and desolate she went in search of "Madame" and employment, was almost too much for her composure.

It was probably well for both Mr. and Mrs. McKenzie that Carroll and Lillian were their traveling companions. It had been decided that, June though it was, the family should return to Carroll Place for several weeks, to arrange for a somewhat extended trip which Mr. and Mrs. McKenzie were to take, as soon as certain matters of business could be settled. During their absence Lillian was to return to the care of her dear "Doctor Grandma and Grandpa;" a fact which staid her tears at parting with them, and made their own hearts less heavy. As for Carroll, his satisfaction in all the arrangements could not, it seemed to him, have been greater. Intimate as his friendship had been with Rebecca all winter, after that first bewildering evening when he went to be introduced to her as his father's prospective wife, their relations had grown more close and confidential. Long evenings they had spent together, during which Rebecca went over for him every little detail which she could recall of her acquaintance with his mother — except, indeed, that dark place in her life which alone had made such intimacy as theirs possible; for that she had encouraged the dead mother to feel that her boy need never know about, and certainly he would not learn the story from her. But all the rest — the gentle words and ways, the loving mention of his name, the constant reference to him as the dear son about whom the love of her heart centered;

all these Rebecca remembered, and went over again and again for the boy who had mourned as perhaps few do, the young and beautiful mother about whom, after all, he knew so little. It seemed wonderful to him, and beautiful, that Rebecca should have known, and loved, and cared for his mother; should have been with her during those last days, should have actually received from her lips messages for him, which she had been treasuring until the best time would come for him to receive them. Altogether, those last weeks which Rebecca spent in the boarding-house, giving what attention she might to music during the day, but giving nearly every evening to Carroll, they had grown to know and love each other almost as mother and son, even before the formal relation was established.

During this homeward journey Mr. McKenzie watched the boy bend over Rebecca and murmur laughingly some confidence in her ear, and noted the look of mutual understanding which the two exchanged, and said, as Carroll went back to Lilian: "My boy brought me his Bible this morning with these words underscored: 'Doth not He see my ways, and number all my steps.' He said that it seemed to him as though the Lord Jesus Christ had chosen his ways for him in a very peculiar manner this last year—led him step by step up to his highest good; and that among the greatest blessings that his life had ever known, he

was sure he would count you ; and his father said, 'Amen.' They were precious words for me to hear, Rebecca." Be sure that they were precious words to her.

She was in her own room at 1200 Carroll Place. It was a lovely summer morning, their first at home, and they were ready to go down to breakfast. Lilian, in spotless white, arrayed by Nancy's own careful hand, had just fluttered in to receive what she called her "dressed-up kisses" — truth to tell, she had received half a dozen kisses already that morning from both father and mother — then she had departed to see if Carroll was ready. Mr. McKenzie had been to the conservatory, and was fastening a spray of violets just where he wanted them on his wife's dress when she said, "O, Deane! one thing I forgot to speak about. Shall we have prayers before or after breakfast?"

"Prayers?" he repeated, half-bewildered. "You and I, do you mean?"

"And the family, of course, dear — family worship, you know."

"O, yes! assuredly I know that families have such a service, some of them; but I am not accustomed to it, you remember."

"But you will establish the custom at once, dear, will you not?"

"I had not thought of it. That may seem strange to you," he added, after a moment, turn-

ing to her with a frank smile, "but it really had not once occurred to me. Now that you speak of it, of course, we are a Christian household ; it is eminently proper. But, Rebecca, would it not be as well to wait until we return in the fall, and are fully established as a family ? We shall be here for so short a time now."

She shook her head. "We are a family now, Deane, as much as we shall be in the fall, and the way one begins is so often the way in which one continues. I should not like to set up my home, even for three weeks, without a family altar. Moreover, Carroll may not be able to be with us in the fall, if the university should open before we should get settled here ; and he is a man now, you know, in some matters, and should take his turn in leading the devotions in his father's house. You will find him quite willing, I think, to do so, and I am sure it will be a joy to you to hear him. After we established the custom of morning prayers in the boarding-house on Sunday mornings—which were the only mornings when we could gather any sort of regularity at an appointed hour—Carroll led without the slightest hesitation whenever called upon, although he was the youngest of them all."

Mr. McKenzie flushed slightly, then laughed as he said, "I am not sure but the son has more courage than the father ; he has not so many years of habit to overcome. But, Rebecca, do not think

me unwilling ; now that you call my attention to it, I know, of course, that it is the only right way to begin. I like that idea of Carroll taking his turn ; and, dear wife, I shall like another one to take her turn, also. It is to be family worship, you know, so the family should divide the duties. Shall there be three of us who will in turn lead the service ? ”

The ready color glowed in Rebecca's cheeks. This was unexpected ; she could certainly say that she had never been accustomed to anything of the kind. Still, did she like to say that she could not ? Her husband waited for his answer.

“ I know you can pray,” he said at last, significantly, “ and it seems eminently proper that the one who taught both father and son to pray should join us in this. Will you ? ”

“ It seems hard to me,” she said ; “ I scarcely know why. Certainly I am not afraid of you, nor of Carroll, nor Lilian ; I have prayed before you each, but — taken collectively — and then there are Mrs. Barnett, and Nancy, and the others. Oh ! that is unworthy of me. I will not let myself be a coward on this, of all subjects. But then, Deane, it is not the usual custom, you know. Still, after all, why should not women join audibly in the family prayer, as well as in the family conversation ? Deane, I will.”

“ I thank you,” he said, smiling. “ Then let us have prayers at once. I have found that there is

nothing like beginning immediately a thing which one dreads a little."

As they went downstairs toward the library he added, "I ought to have established the custom during the winter. It did not once occur to me that I was the head of a household. Nothing is plainer than that I have needed you all winter to help me see clearly the right steps to take. If I needed you half as much as I wanted you, Rebecca, my need was sore."

She had no words with which to answer him. In truth, her lips were too tremulous to frame words. Perhaps you cannot think what it was to her to be sure that while life lasted she would be wanted. But there was no chance for reply; they were in the library now, where Rebecca had not been since she went to receive her directions for the day. Carroll and Lilian were there, and while Rebecca moved toward them the master of the house touched his bell.

"Rogers," he said, as that faithful attendant appeared, "call Mrs. Barnett and the others, and say to them that we will have family worship in the library at once."

"Yes, sir," said Rogers, and disappeared.

And Rebecca said to herself that the master of the house spoke and acted precisely as though family worship had been the custom in the McKenzie households from time immemorial.

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